UNADDRESSED LETTERS

BY
SIR FRANK A.
SWETTENHAM

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BY

SIR FRANK ATHELSTANE SWETTENHAM, K.C.M.G.

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JOHN LANE
LONDON AND NEW YORK
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PREFACE

"I HAD a friend who loved me;" but he has gone, and the "great gulf" is between us.

After his death I received a packet of manuscript with these few words:—

"What I have written may appeal to you because of our friendship, and because, when you come to read them, you will seek to grasp, in these apparent confidences, an inner meaning that to the end will elude you. If you think others, not the many but the few, might find here any answer to their unuttered questionings, any fellowship of sympathy in those experiences which are the milestones of our lives, then use the letters as you will, but without my name. I shall have gone, and the knowledge of my name would make no one either wiser or happier."

In the packet I found these letters. I cannot tell whether there is any special order in which they should be read—there was nothing to guide me

on that point. I do not know whether they are to real or imaginary people, whether they were ever sent or only written as an amusement, a relief to feeling, or with a purpose—the one to which they are now put, for instance. One thing is certain, namely, that, however taken, they are not all indited to the same person; of that there seems to be convincing internal evidence.

The writer was, by trade, a diplomatist; by inclination, a sportsman with literary and artistic tastes; by force of circumstances he was a student of many characters, and in some sense a cynic. He was also a traveller—not a great traveller, but he knew a good deal of Europe, a little of America, much of India and the further East. He spent some time in this neighbourhood, and was much interested in the country and its people. There is an Eastern atmosphere about many of the letters, and he made no secret of the fact that he was fascinated by the glamour of the lands of sunshine. He died very suddenly by misadventure, and, even to me, his packet of letters came rather as a revelation.

Before determining to publish the letters, I showed them to a friend on whose opinion I knew the writer had set store. He said, "The critic will declare there is too much scenery, too much sentiment.

Very likely he will be right for those whose lives are passed in the streets of London, and the letters will not interest so many readers as would stories of blood and murder. Yet leave them. Love is in the atmosphere day and night, and the scenery is in true proportion to our lives here, where, after all, sunsets are commoner than murders." Therefore I have left them as they came to me, only using my discretion to omit some of the letters altogether.

F. A. S.

February 12, 1898.

"Thus fare you well right hertely beloved frende . . . and love me as you have ever done, for I love you better than ever I dyd."

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UNADDRESSED LETTERS

I

THE HILL OF SOLITUDE

AN hour ago I climbed the narrow, winding path that circles the Hill of Solitude, and as I 'gained the summit and sat upon that narrow bench, facing the west, I may have fallen into a trance, for there appeared to me an ever-changing vision of unearthly beauty.

The sun was sinking into the sea, directly in a line with the wide estuary that marks a distant river's mouth. It was setting in a blaze of molten gold, while all above and to the northward, the background of sky glowed with that extraordinary, clear pale-blue blent with green, that makes one of the most striking features of the sunsets seen from this hill. The clouds were fewer to-night, the background wider and clearer, the colour more

intense, more transparent, as though the earnest gazer might even discern some greater glory, beyond and through the shining crystal of those heavenly windows.

The calm surface of the sea beneath mirrored the lights above, till sea and sky vied with each other in a perfection of delicate translucent sheen. Northwards a few grey-gold clouds lay against this wondrous background, but in the south they were banked in heavy masses, far down the sky to the limits of vision.

Out of a deep forest-clad valley, immediately behind the hill, a freshening breeze was driving volumes of white mist across the northern spur; driving it, at racing speed, in whirling, tangled wisps, across the water-holes that cluster around the foot of the great range; driving it over the wide plain, out towards the glittering coast-line.

But in a moment, as though by magic, the thick banks of cloud in the south were barred with broad shafts of brilliant *rose dorée;* the spaces of clear sky, which, an instant before, were pale silver-blue, became pale green, momentarily deepening in intensity of tone. Close around the setting sun the gold was turning to flame, and, as the glory

of magnificent colouring spread over all the south, the clouds took every rainbow hue, as though charged with a galaxy of living, palpitating radiance, grand yet fateful, a God-painted picture of battle and blazing cities, of routed hosts and desperate pursuit.

Overhead, and filling the arc from zenith to the outer edge of sun-coloured cloud, the sky was a deep sapphire, half covered by soft, rounded clouds of deeper sapphire still, only their edges tinged with gleams of dull gold.

Another sweep of the magic wand, and, as the patches of pale aquamarine deepened into emerald, the heavier clouds became heliotrope, and a thick heliotrope haze floated gently across the wide plain, seawards. The fires of crimson light blazed brighter in the gathering gloom of rising mist and lowering cloud, but the sea shone with ever-increasing clearness in the rapidly narrowing space of yet unhidden view.

For a moment the mist disappeared, as suddenly as it came; the sapphire clouds took a deeper hue, heliotrope turned to purple, the crimson lights were softer but richer in colour, streaked with narrow bands of gold, and dark arrowlike shafts shot from the bow of Night.

Standing there, it was as though one were vouchsafed, for a moment, a vision of the Heavenly City which enshrines the glory of God. One caught one's breath and shivered, as at the sound of violins quivering under inspired fingers, or the voices of boys singing in a cathedral choir.

All this while a solitary, ragged-edged cloud-kite hung, almost motionless, in middle distance, over the glittering waters of the river mouth. This cloud gathered blackness and motion, spread itself out, like a dark thick veil, and, as the mist, now grey and cold, closed in, the last sparks of the dying sunset were extinguished in the distant sea.

And then I was stumbling down the path in the darkness, my eyes blinded by the glory of the vision; and as I groped through the gloom, and heard the wail of the night-wind rushing from those far-away mountains, across this lonely peak, I began to wonder whether I had not been dreaming dreams conjured up by the sadly-sweet associations of the place.

The darkness deepened, and, as I reached the dividing saddle and began to mount the opposite hill, I heard the faint jingle of a dangling coin striking metal, and I said to myself that such

associations, acting on the physical weariness resulting from days of intolerable strain, followed by nights of worse regret, were enough to account for far stranger journeys in the land which lies beyond the Gates of Ivory and Horn.

II

OF WORSHIP

"THIS life—good as it can be—is horribly difficult and complicated. I feel as though I were walking in the dark, just stumbling along and groping my way—there seems to be no light to guide me—you are so far away, and there is ever that wall between us,—no higher than before, but quite as impenetrable—I wonder,—I wonder,—I wonder what the future will bring to you,—to me."

"I think of you up there, among the soft white clouds, watching the sun setting into the sea, while the great blue hills are melting through twilight into night. Oh! there's nothing like that beauty here,—in the West,—and I am sick for the East and all her hot, passionate loveliness; all her colour and light; all her breadth and grandeur; for her magnificent storms and life,—life on a big scale. Here everything is so small, so petty, so

trivial. I want,—I want,—I want,—that's how I feel; I am lovesick and heartsick and sick for the sun. Well, this life is nearly done, and in the next I shall at least be worshipped."

That is well, and if you are worshipped you should not say "at least." What more can you want? Especially since, having all other things and lacking worship, you would have nothing. They were not meant for this application, but these old Monkish lines are worth remembering:—

"*Qui Christum nescit, nil scit, si cætera noscit.*
Qui Christum noscit, sat scit, si cætera nescit."

I hardly like to suggest it, but are you afraid of the "worship," of its quality, or its lasting properties? Or, assured on these points, do you think worship alone will prove unsatisfying? I wonder.

It is an attractive subject, and women disagree as to how it should be treated. The fact is, that they are seldom able to generalise; they do not take any great interest in generalities, and the answer to an impersonal question must have a personal application before it can be given. And not that alone, for where, as in this case, and, indeed, all those of greatest human interest, another

person, a special person, is concerned, then the answer depends largely on that other person as well. You can, perhaps, in your own mind, think of some one or more from whom you would rather have a little worship, than become an object of life-long adoration to many others who have seemed anxious to offer it. And that is not because their all was less than the little of those with a larger capacity for the worship of human beings, nor even because their appreciation of your personal worth is in any degree limited, or smaller by comparison with that of others. Probably it is exactly the reverse. But I will ask you, of your sweetness and light, to give me knowledge. Would you rather have the absolute, unsought worship of a man, or would you win, perchance even from his unwillingness, a devotion that, if it was not thrown at you, was probably, when gained, not likely to burn itself out in a blaze of ardent protestations? You will, of course, say that it depends on the attitude assumed by the man, and I reply that it does not, because the same man would never be found ready to render his service in either of these —well—disguises, if you will. It would be in one or in the other. Therefore my question will admit of the personal application, and you can go

through your acquaintances, admirers, friends (I dare not say the other word), and tell me whether you would be most attracted by the man who fell at your feet and worshipped, giving of his ample store without effort and without stint, or by the man who, if he were a woman, would be called *difficile.* This problem will give you no trouble if, as I said before, you can work it out as a personal equation, and it is therefore only necessary that you should have amongst your friends two men of the required types.

In return for your anticipated answer, I will give you this. There are many men who pay their court to women, if not all in one breath, or at one sitting, at least the phase is limited by a definite period. That period is usually shorter or longer in the inverse ratio of the violence of the attack. The operations result in a decisive action, where the man is either worsted or victorious. If he gains his end, and persuades the lady to take him for whatever he is worth, the ordinary type of Englishman will very often consider that his obligation towards her as an idolater, a lover,—whatever name you call the part by,—is over when the curtain comes down on the procession to the altar or to the office of the Registrar, or, at any

rate, when the honeymoon has set and the duty-moon rises to wax and wane for evermore. That is the man to avoid; and if the womanly instinct, which is so useful and so little understanded of men (until they learn to fear its unerring accuracy), is only called upon in time, it will not mislead its owner.

You know all this, you will say; very likely, but it is extraordinary how many thousands of women, especially English women, there are who are now eating out their hearts, because they neglected either to ask this question of their instincts or disregarded the answer. Probably it is very seldom asked; for a girl is hardly likely to suppose that, after feeding her on love for a few weeks, or months, the man will starve her of the one thing needful, until death does at last part them. He says he has not time for love-making, and he acts as though he had not the inclination either, though probably, somewhere in his system he keeps the forces that once stirred him to expressions of affection that now seem as needless as it would be to ask his servants for permission to eat the dinner which he has paid for, and which he can take or neglect, praise or find fault with, at his own will and pleasure.

That is a very long homily, but it has grown out of the point of the pen, possibly because I am sitting here alone, "up in the soft white clouds," as you say, or rather in the softer moonlight; and some of the littlenesses of life loom large, but not over-large, considering their bearing on the lifelong happiness, or misery, of men and women.

Yes, I am sitting exactly where you imagined. It was on that sofa that you used to lie in the evenings, when you were too feeble to sit up, and I read to you out of a book of knowledge. But that was years and years ago, and now you wonder. Well, I too wonder, and—there, it has just struck 1 A.M.—I will wonder no more, but look out at the surpassing loveliness of this white night, and then—rest.

It is so strange, I have come back to tell you. The soft white clouds are actually there—motionless—they cover everything, sea and plain and valley, everything but the loftiest ridges of this mountain. The moon rides high, turning to silver the tops of the great billowy clouds, while it shines full on this house and garden, casting deep shadows from the fern-trees across the gravel, and, from the eaves and pillars of the house, across the verandah. The air is perfectly still now, though,

some hours ago, it was blowing a gale and the wind wailed as though mourning its own lost soul.

It seemed then, as it tore round the corner of the house, to be crying, "I come from the rice swamps which have no dividing banks, from the waters which contain no fish, where the apes cry by night and the baboons drink as they hang from the boughs; a place where the *chinchili* resorts to bathe, and where man's food is the *kŏmahang* fern." Some day I will tell you more about that place.

And the spirits of the storm that have passed and left this death-like stillness, where are they now? They went seaward, westward, to youward, but they will never reach you, and you will not hear their message.

III

WEST AND EAST

ONE night, in the early months of this year, I sat at dinner next to a comparatively young married woman, of the type that is superlatively blonde in colour and somewhat over-ample in figure. She was indifferently dressed, not very well informed, but apparently anxious, by dint of much questioning, to improve her knowledge where possible. She was, I believe, a journalist.

Some one must have told her that I had been in the East, and she, like most stay-at-home peopl , evidently thought that those who go beyond the shores of England can only be interested in, or have an acquaintance with, the foreign country wherein they have sojourned. Therefore the lady fired at me a volley of questions, about the manners and habits of the Malay people, whom she always referred to as "savages." I ventured to say that she must have a mistaken, or at any rate incom-

plete, knowledge of the race to speak of Malays as savages, but she assured me that people who were black, and not Christians, could only be as she described them. I declined to accept that definition, and added that Malays are not black. I fancy she did not believe me; but she said it did not matter, as they were not white and wore no clothes. I am afraid I began to be almost irritated, for the long waits between the courses deprived me of all shelter from the rain of questions and inconsequent remarks.

At last, I said, "It may surprise you to hear that these savages would think, if they saw you now, that you are very insufficiently clad;" and I added, to try and take the edge off a speech that I felt was inexcusably rude, "they consider the ordinary costume of white *men* so immodest as to be almost indecent." "Indeed," said the lady, who only seemed to hear the last statement, "I have often thought so too, but I am surprised that savages, for I must call them savages, should mind about such things." It was hopeless, and I asked how soon the great American people might be expected to send a force to occupy London.

I have just been reminded of this conversation. A few days ago, I wrote to a friend of mine, a

Malay Sultan, whom I have not seen for some months, a letter inquiring how he was, and saying I hoped soon to be able to visit him. Now comes his answer; and you, who are in sympathy with the East, will be able to appreciate the missive of this truculent savage.

In the cover there were three enclosures: a formal letter of extreme politeness, written by a scribe, the Arabic characters formed as precisely and clearly as though they had been printed. Secondly, a letter written in my friend's own hand, also in the Arabic character, but the handwriting is very difficult to decipher. And thirdly there is another paper, headed "Hidden Secrets," written also in the Sultan's own hand. The following is a translation of the beginning of the second letter. At the top of the first page is written, "Our friendship is sealed in the inmost recesses of my heart." Then this: "I send this letter to my honoured and renowned friend" (here follow my name, designation, and some conventional compliments). The letter then continues: "You, my dear friend, are never out of my thoughts, and they are always wishing you well. I hear that you are coming to see me, and for that reason my heart is exceeding glad, as though the moon had fallen into my lap,

or I had been given a cluster of flowers grown in the garden called *Bènjerâna Sri*, wide-opening under the influence of the sun's warm rays. May God the Most Mighty hasten our meeting, so that I may assuage the thirst of longing in the happy realisation of my affectionate and changeless regard. At the moment of writing, by God's grace, and thanks to your prayers, I and my family are in good health, and this district is in the enjoyment of peace; but the river is in flood, and has risen so high that I fear for the safety of the bridge."

There is more, but what I have quoted is enough to show you the style. When the savage has turned from his savagery he will write "Dear sir," and "Yours truly"; his correspondence will be type-written, in English, and the flaxen-haired lady will remark with approval that the writer is a business man and a Christian, and hardly black at all.

Whilst the Malays are still in my mind, it may interest you to know that they have a somewhat original form of verse in four-line stanzas, each stanza usually complete in itself, the second and fourth lines rhyming. The last two lines convey the sense, while the first two are only introduced to get the rhythm, and often mean nothing at all.

Here are some specimens which may give you an idea of these *pantun*, as they are called, though in translating them I have made no attempt to give the necessary "jingle."

"A climbing bean will gain the roof;
The red *kĕmbiscus* has no scent.
All eyes can see a house on fire;
No smoke the burning heart betrays.

Hark! the flutter of the death's-head moth;
It flies behind the headman's house.
Before the Almighty created Adam,
Our destinies were already united.

This is the twenty-first night of the moon,
The night when women die in child-birth.
I am but as a captive song-bird,
A captive bird in the hand of the fowler.

If you must travel far up river,
Search for me in every village;
If you must die, while I yet linger,
Wait for me at the Gate of Heaven."

One of the fascinations of letter-writing is that one can wander at will from one subject to another, as the butterflies flutter from flower to flower; but I suppose there is nearly always something that suggests to the writer the sequence of thought, though it might be difficult to explain exactly what that something is. I think the reference in the

above stanzas to Adam and the Gate of Heaven,—or Paradise,—have suggested to me the snake,

"And even in Paradise devise the snake,"

which reminds me that, last night, I said to the ancient and worthy person to whom is entrusted the care of this house—

"Leave the drawing-room doors open while I am at dinner: the room gets overheated."

Then he, "I not like leave open the doors, because plenty snakes."

"Snakes: where?"

"Outside, plenty snakes, leave doors open come inside."

"What sort of snakes?"

"Long snakes" (stretching out his arm to show the length), "short snakes" (measuring off about a foot with the other hand).

"Have you seen them?"

"Yes, plenty."

This is cheerful news, and I inquire: "Where?"

"In bedrooms."

"When?"

"Sometimes daytime, sometimes night-time."

An even pleasanter prospect,—but I am still full of unbelief.

"Have you seen them yourself?"

"Yes, I kill."

"But when and how was it?"

"One time master not here, lady staying here; daytime I kill one long snake, here, this room—night-time lady call me, I kill one short snake in bedroom."

"Which bedroom?"

"Master's bedroom."

That is not exactly reassuring, especially when you like to leave your doors and windows open, and sleep in the dark. I thank him, and he goes away, having entirely destroyed my peace of mind. The wicked old man! I wish I could have seen his face as he went out. Now I go delicately, both "daytime" and "night-time," above all at night-time, and I am haunted by the dread of the "plenty long snake, plenty short snake." In one's bedroom too, it is a gruesome idea. If I had gone on questioning him, I dare say he would have told me he killed a "plenty long snake" inside the bed, trying to warm itself under the bed-clothes in this absurdly cold place. I always thought this a paradise, but without the snake. Alas! how easily one's cherished beliefs are destroyed.

It is past midnight; the moon is full, and look-

ing down, resplendent in all her majesty, bathes everything in a silver radiance. I love to go and stand in it; but the verandahs are full of ferns, roses and honeysuckle twine round the pillars, the shadows are as dark as the lights are bright, and everywhere there is excellent cover for the "long snake" and the "short snake." Perhaps bed is the safest place after all, and to-morrow—well, to-morrow I can send for a mongoose.

IV

A CLEVER MONGOOSE

IN my last letter I told you how the ancient who guards this Eden had complained of the prevalence of snakes, and I, with an experience which Adam does not appear to have possessed, determined to send for a mongoose to deal with the matter. Well, I saw nothing of the serpent, did not even dream about him, and forgot all about the mongoose. It is the thought of what I last wrote to you that reminds me of an excellent story, and a curious trick which I once witnessed, both having to do with the mongoose.

First the story. A boy of twenty got into a train one day, and found, already seated in the carriage, a man of middle age, who had beside him, on the floor, a closed basket. The train started, and by-and-by the boy, feeling dull, looked at his companion, and, to break the ice, said—

"Is that your basket, sir?"

To which the stranger, who did not at all relish the idea of being dragged into a conversation with a strange youth, replied, "Yes, it is," slightly stammering as he said it.

A pause,—then the boy, "I beg your pardon, but is there some beast in it?"

The man, annoyed, "Ye—es, there's a m—mongoose in it."

The boy had no idea what a mongoose was, but he had the curiosity of youth and was unabashed, so he said, "May I ask what the mongoose is for?"

The man, decidedly irritated, and wishing to silence his companion, "G—got a f—friend that sees snakes, t—taking the m—mongoose to catch 'em."

The boy concluded the stranger was mad, and wishing to pacify him, said—

"Yes, but the snakes are not really there, are they?"

The man, "No, n—neither is the m—mongoose."

Now as to my experience. Some years ago I was in Calcutta, and, walking in the street one day, I was accosted by a man carrying a bag and leading a mongoose by a string. He said, "I

Madras man, master want to see plenty trick, I very good conjurer," and he produced a sheaf of more or less grimy credentials, in which it was stated, by a number of reputable people, that he was a conjurer of unusual skill. When I had looked at some of the papers, he said, "I come master's house, do trick, this very clever mongoose, I bring him show master."

I was quite willing, so I gave him my address and told him to come whenever he liked.

Some days later the conjurer was announced, and there happened to be in my rooms at the time a German dealer in Japanese curios, who had seen rather more than usual during a sixteen years' residence in Japan and the Farthest East. He was an extremely amusing old person, and glad of the opportunity of seeing the conjurer, who was duly admitted to our presence with his bag of properties. The very clever mongoose came in last, at the end of his string.

The conjurer certainly justified his reputation, and performed some extremely clever tricks, while the mongoose sat by with a *blasé* expression, taking very little interest in the proceedings. When the conjurer had come to the end of his programme, or thought he had done enough, he offered to sell

the secret of any trick I liked to buy, and, taking him at his word, I was shown several tricks, the extreme simplicity of the deceit, when once you knew it, being rather aggravating.

In the interest of watching the performance and the subsequent explanations, I had forgotten the mongoose, and the conjurer was already pushing his paraphernalia into the sack, when I said, "But the mongoose, the clever mongoose, where is his trick?"

The conjurer sat down again, pulled the mongoose towards him, and tied the end of his string to a chair leg, giving the little beast plenty of rope on which to play. Then the man pushed round in front of him an earthenware *chatty* or water-vessel, which had hitherto stood on the floor, a piece of dirty cloth being tied over its mouth. Next the conjurer thrust his hand into the sack, and pulled out one of the trumpet-mouthed pipes on which Indians play weird and discordant airs.

Now I want you to remember that this was my room, that the man's stock-in-trade was contained in the sack which he had pushed on one side, that the pieces in the game were the mongoose, the *chatty* (or what it contained), and the pipe, while the lynx-eyed curio-dealer and I sat as close as

we pleased to see fair play. I am obliged to tell you that; of what happened I attempt no explanation, I only relate exactly what I saw.

The stage being arranged as I have described, the conjurer drew the *chatty* towards him, and said, "Got here one very good snake, catch him in field this morning;" at the same time he untied the cloth, and with a jerk threw on the floor an exceedingly lively snake, about three feet long. From the look of it, I should say it was not venomous. The conjurer had thrown the snake close to the mongoose, who jumped out of its way with surprising agility, while the conjurer kept driving it towards the little beast. Neither snake nor mongoose seemed to relish the situation, and to force the game the conjurer seized the snake by the tail, and, swinging it thereby, tried, two or three times, to hit the mongoose with it. This seemed to rouse both beast and reptile, and the mongoose, making a lightning-like movement, seized the snake by the head, shook it for a second or two, dragging it over the matting, and then dropped it on the floor. The instant the snake showed fight the conjurer had let it go, and the mongoose did the rest.

Where the snake had been dragged, the floor

was smeared with blood, and now the creature lay, giving a few spasmodic twitches of its body, and then was still. The conjurer pulled it towards him, held it up by the tail, and said laconically, "Snake dead." The mongoose meanwhile sat quietly licking its paw as though nothing particular had happened.

As the man held it up I looked very carefully at the snake; one eye was bulging out, by reason of a bite just over it; the head and neck were covered with blood, and as far as my judgment went, the thing was dead as Herod. The conjurer dropped the snake on the floor, where it fell limply, as any dead thing would, then he put it on its back and coiled it up, head inwards, saying again, "You see, snake dead."

He left the thing lying there, and searched in his sack till he found what appeared to be a very small piece of wood, it was, in fact, exactly like a wooden match. The sack, all this time, was at his side, but not close to him, while the snake was straight in front of him, under our noses. Breaking off a very small piece of the wood, he gave it to the mongoose, which began to eat it, apparently as a matter of duty. At the same time the conjurer took an even smaller bit of the same stuff,

and opening the snake's mouth, pushed the stick, or whatever it was, inside, and then shut the mouth again. This transaction would, I think, have convinced any one who saw it that there was no life in the snake.

The conjurer now took up his pipe, and made it squeal some high discordant notes. Then taking it from his lips, he said in Hindustani, as he touched the snake's tail with the pipe, "Put out your tail," and the creature's tail moved slowly outwards, a little way from the rest of the coiled body. The conjurer skirled another stave on his pipe, and as he lowered the instrument with his left hand, he exclaimed, "Snake all right now," and stretched out his right hand at the same instant, to seize the reptile by the tail. Either as he touched it, or just before, the snake with one movement was up, wriggling and twisting, apparently more alive than when first taken out of the *chatty*. While the conjurer thrust it back into the vessel there was plenty of time to remark that, miraculous as the resurrection appeared to be, the creature's eye still protruded through the blood which oozed from the hole in its head.

As he tied the rag over the top of the *chatty*, the conjurer said, with a smile, "Very clever mon-

goose," gathered up his sack, took the string of his clever assistant in his left hand, raised his right to his forehead, and with a low bow, and a respectful "Salâam, Sahib," had left the room before I had quite grasped the situation.

I looked at the dealer in curios, and, as with Bill Nye, "he gazed upon me," but in our few minutes' conversation, before he left, he could throw no light on the mystery, and we agreed that our philosophy was distinctly at fault.

That evening I related what had taken place to half-a-dozen men, all of whom had lived in India for some years, and I asked if any of them had seen and could explain the phenomenon.

No one had seen it, some had heard of it, all plainly doubted my story. One suggested that a new snake had been substituted for that killed by the mongoose, and another thought that there was no real snake at all, only a wooden make-believe. That rather exasperated me, and I said I was well enough acquainted with snakes to be able to distinguish them from chair-legs. As the company was decidedly sceptical, and inclined to be facetious at my expense, I said I would send for the man again, and they could tell me how the thing was done when they had seen it.

I sent, and it so happened that the conjurer came on a Sunday, when I was sitting in the hall, on the ground-floor of the house where I was staying. The conjurer was already squatted on the white marble flags, with his sack and his *chatty* (the mongoose's string held under his foot), when my friends, the unbelievers, or some of them, returned from church, and joined me to watch the proceedings. I will not weary you by going through it all again. What took place then was an exact repetition of what occurred in my room, except that this time the man had a larger *chatty*, which contained several snakes, and when he had taken out one, and the mongoose had consented to lay hold of it, he worried the creature as a terrier does a rat, and, pulling his string away from under his master's foot, he carried the snake into the corner of the room, whither the conjurer pursued him and deprived him of his prey. The result of the encounter was that the marble was smeared with streaks of blood that effectually disposed of the wooden-snake theory. That little incident was certainly not planned by the conjurer; but when the victim had been duly coiled on the floor and the bit of stick placed (like the coin with which to fee Charon) within its mouth, then, to my surprise,

the conjurer re-opened the *chatty*, took out *another* snake, which in its turn was apparently killed by the mongoose, and this one was coiled up and laid on the floor beside the first victim. Then, whilst the first corpse was duly resuscitated, according to the approved methods I have already described, the second lay on the floor, without a sign of life, and it was only when No. 1 had been "resurrectioned," and put back in the vessel, that the conjurer took up the case of No. 2, and, with him, repeated the miracle.

This time I was so entertained by the manifest and expressed astonishment of the whilom scoffers, that again the conjurer had gone before I had an opportunity of buying this secret, if indeed he would have sold it. I never saw the man again.

There is the story, and, even as it stands, I think you will admit that the explanation is not exactly apparent on the surface. I can assure you, however, that wherever the deception (and I diligently, but unsuccessfully, sought to find it), the performance was the most remarkable I have ever witnessed in any country. To see a creature, full of life,—and a snake, at close quarters, is apt to impress you with its vitality,—to see it killed, just under your eyes, to watch its last convulsive

struggles, to feel it in your hands, and gaze at it as it lies, limp and dead, for a space of minutes; then heigh, presto! and the thing is wriggling about as lively as ever. It is a very curious trick —if trick it is.

That, however, is not quite all.

A month or two later I was sitting in the verandah of an hotel in Agra. A number of American globe-trotters occupied most of the other chairs, or stood about the porch, where I noticed there was a little knot of people gathered together. I was idly staring into the street when the words, "Very clever little mongoose," suddenly attracted my attention, and I realised that two Indian conjurers were amusing the party in the porch. I went at once to the spot, and found the mongoose-snake trick was just beginning. I watched it with great attention, and I noticed that the mongoose only seemed to give the snake one single nip, and there was very little blood drawn. The business proceeded merrily, and in all respects in accordance with what I had already seen, until, at the conclusion of the sort of Salvation-Army resurrection-march, the juggler declared that the snake was quite alive and well—but he was not, he was dead, dead as Bahram the Great Hunter. No

piping or tickling or pulling of his tail could awaken the very faintest response from that limp carcass, and the conjurers shuffled their things together with downcast faces, and departed in what the spectators called "a frost." To them, no doubt, the game was absolutely meaningless; to me it seemed that the mongoose had "exceeded his instructions."

V

A BLUE DAY

"THERE is a green hill," you know it well; it is not very "far away," perhaps a little over a mile, but then that mile is not quite like other miles. For one thing it takes you up 500 feet, and as that is the last pull to reach the highest point of this range (the summit of a mountain over 5000 feet in height), the climb is steep. Indeed, one begins by going down some rough stone steps, between two immense granite boulders; then you make a half-circuit of the hill by a path cut on the level, and thence descend for at least 250 feet, till you are on the narrow saddle which joins this peak to the rest of the range. Really, therefore, in a distance of little over half a mile there is an ascent of 750 feet.

And what a path it is that brings you here! For I am now on the summit, though several times on the way I was sorely tempted to sit down and

put on paper the picture of that road as it lay before my eyes. It is a narrow jungle track, originally made by the rhinoceros, the bison, and the elephant, and now simply kept clear of falling trees. It is exceeding steep, as I have said, and you may remember. It begins by following the stony bed of a mountain stream, dry in fine weather, but full of water after half-an-hour's tropical rain. Where the path is not covered by roots or stones, it is of a chocolate colour; but, in the main, it is overspread by a network of gnarled and knotted tree-roots, which, in the lapse of ages, have become so interlaced that they hide the soil. These roots, the stones round which they are often twined, and the banks on either side, are covered by mosses in infinite variety, so that when you look upwards the path stands like a moss-grown cleft in the wood.

The forest through which this track leads is a mass of dwarfed trees, of palms, shrubs, and creepers. Every tree, without exception, is clothed with moss, wherever there is room to cling on branch or stem, while often there are great fat tufts of it growing in and round the forks, or at any other place with convenient holding. The trees are moss-grown, but that is only where the

innumerable creepers, ferns, and orchids leave any space to cover. The way in which these things climb up, embrace, and hang to every tree or stick that will give them a footing is simply marvellous. Even the great granite boulders are hidden by this wealth of irresistible vegetation. Through the green foliage blaze vivid patches of scarlet, marking the dazzling blossoms of a rhododendron that may be seen in all directions, but usually perched high on some convenient tree. Then there is the wonderful magnolia with its creamy petals; the jungle apple-blossom, whose white flowers are now turning to crimson berries; the forest lilac, graceful in form, and a warm heliotrope in colour. These first catch the eye, but, by-and-by, one realises that there are orchids everywhere, and that, if the blossoms are not great in size or wonderful in colour, they are still charming in form, and painted in delicate soft tones of lilac and brown, orange and lemon, while one, with strings of large, pale, apple-green blossoms, is as lovely as it is *bizarre*.

As for palms, the forest is full of them, in every size, colour, and shape; and wherever the sunlight can break through the foliage will be found the graceful fronds of the giant tree-fern. Lastly, the ground is carpeted with an extravagant luxuriance

of ferns and flowers and "creeping things innumerable, both small and great." The wasteful abundance of it all is what first strikes one, and then you begin to see the beauty of the details. Masses of *lycopodium*, ringing all the changes through wonderful metallic-blue to dark and light green, and then to russet brown; there are Malay primroses, yellow and blue, and a most delightful little pale-violet trumpet, with crinkled lip, gazing towards the light from the highest point of its delicate stem. On either side of this path one sees a dozen jungle flowers in different shades of blue or lilac; it seems to be the prevailing colour for the small flowers, as scarlet and yellow are for the great masses of more striking blossom. And then there are birds —oh yes, there are birds, but they are strange, like their surroundings. At the foot of this hill I came suddenly on a great black-and-white hornbill, which, seeing me, slowly got up and flew away with the noise of a train passing at a distance. High up the path was a collection of small birds, flitting and twittering amongst the leaves. There were hardly two of the same plumage, but most of them carried their tails spread out like fans, and many had pronounced tufts of feathers on their heads. The birds at this height are usually silent, and, when

they make any sound at all, they do not seem to sing but to call; and from the jungle all round, far and near, loud and faint, will be heard similar answering calls. I was surprised to hear, suddenly, some bars of song, close by me, and I waited for a long time, peering earnestly into the tree from which the sound came; but I saw nothing and heard nothing beyond the perpetual double note (short and long, with the accent on the latter) of a bird that must be the bore and outcast of the forest.

Coming out into the clearing which crowns the hill, I passed several kinds of graceful grasses, ten or twelve feet high, and the flight of steps which leads to the actual summit is cut through a mass of bracken, over and through which hang the strange, delicately painted cups of the *nepenthes*, the stems of the bracken rising from a bed made rosy by the countless blossoms of a three-pointed pale-pink starwort.

In the jungle one could only see the things within reach, but, once on the peak, one has only eyes for the grandeur and magnificence of an unequalled spectacle.

The view seems limitless, it is complete in every direction, unbarred by any obstruction, natural or

artificial. First I look eastwards to those great ranges of unexplored mountains, rising tier after tier, their outlines clear as cut cameos against the grey-blue sky. Betwixt them and my point of sight flows a great river, and though it is ten or twelve miles distant as the crow flies, I can see that it is brown with flood-water, and, in some places, overflowing its banks. Nearer lie the green rice-fields and orchards, and, nearer still, the spurs of the great range on whose highest point I stand.

Then northward, that is the view that is usually shut out from me. It is only hill and dale, river and plain, but it is grand by reason of its extent, beautiful in colour and form, intensely attractive in the vastness of those miles of mysterious jungle, untrodden, save by the feet of wild beasts; endless successions of mountain and valley, peak and spur, immovable and eternal. You know there are grey days and golden days; as there are crimson and heliotrope evenings, white, and, alas! also black nights—well, this is a blue day. There is sunlight, but it is not in your eyes, it only gives light without shedding its own colour on the landscape. The atmosphere seems to be blue; the sky is blue, except on the horizon, where it pales into a clear

grey. Blue forest-clad hills rise, in the middle distance, from an azure plain, and the distant mountains are sapphire, deep sapphire. The effect is strange and uncommon, but supremely beautiful.

Westward, a deep valley runs down from this range into the flat, forest-covered plains, till, nearing the coast, great patches of light mark fields of sugar-canes and thousands upon thousands of acres of rice. Then the sea, the sea dotted by distant islands, the nearest thirty miles away, the farthest perhaps fifty. The morning heat is drawing a veil of haze across the distance; on a clear evening a great island, eighty miles away to the northward, is clearly visible.

I turn to the south, and straight before me rises the grand blue peak of a mountain, 6000 feet high, and not more than six miles away. It is the highest point of a gigantic mass of hill that seems to fill the great space between the flooded river and the bright calm sea. Looking across the eastern shoulder of the mountain, the eye wanders over a wide plain, lost far away to the south in cloud-wrapt distance. Beyond the western slopes lies the calm mirror of a summer sea, whereon many islands seem to float. The coast-line is broken, picturesque and beautiful, by reason of its many

indentations and the line of bold hills which, rising sheer out of the water, seem to guard the shore.

Due west I see across the deep valley into my friend's house, where it crowns the ridge, and then beyond to that vast plain which, in its miles and miles of forest-covered flatness, broken by great river-mouths, long vistas of deep lagoons, and a group of shining pools scattered over its surface, forms one of the strangest features in this matchless panorama of mountain, river and plain, sea, sky, and ever-changing cloud-effects.

There is an empty one-roomed hut of brown palm-leaves on this most lonely peak. One pushes the mat window upwards and supports it on a stick,—beneath the window is a primitive seat or couch. That is where I have been sitting, a cool breeze blowing softly through the wide open windows. I could not stay there any longer, the place seemed full of memories of another day, when there was no need, and no inclination, to look outside to see the beauty of the world and the divine perfection of the Creator's genius. And then I heard something, it must have been fancy, but there was a faint but distinct jingle of metal.

It is better out here, sitting on a moss-grown boulder in the pleasant warmth of the sun. The

swifts are circling the hill, and they flash past me with the hiss of a sword cleaving the air. I look down on the tops of all these stunted trees, heavy with their burden of creepers and mosses straining towards the light. A great bunch of pitcher-plants is hanging in front of me, pitcher-plants a foot long, scarlet and yellow, green and purple, in all the stages of their growth, their lids standing tilted upwards, leaving the pitcher open to be filled by any passing shower. But my eyes travel across all the intervening miles to rest upon the sea, the sea which is now of a quite indescribable blue, basking under a sky of the same colour. Out there, westward, if I could only pierce the distance, I should see——

Ah! the great white clouds are rising and warning me to go. Good-bye! good-bye! for you the missing words are as plain as these.

VI

OF LOVE, IN FICTION

I HAVE been reading "Casa Braccio," and I must talk to you about it. Of course I do not know whether you have read it or not, so if I bore you forgive me. I was much interested in Part I., rather disappointed with Part II., and it struck me that Mr. Crawford showed signs in Part III. of weariness with the characters of his own creation. There are nine people who play important parts in the story, and the author kills six of them. The first, an abbess, dies naturally but conveniently; the second, an innkeeper's daughter, dies suddenly, by misadventure; the third, a nun, dies, one is not told how, when, or where—but she dies. This is disappointing, because she promised to be a very interesting character. Then the fourth, daughter of No. 3, commits suicide, because, having run away from her husband, and got tired of the other man, the husband declines to have her back. The

fifth, a most uninteresting and weak-kneed individual, is an artist, husband of No. 4, and he dies, apparently to make himself disagreeable; while the sixth, the original cause of all the trouble, is murdered by the innkeeper, who has been hunting him, like a good Christian, for twenty years, determined to kill him when found, under the mistaken impression that he eloped with, and disposed of, his daughter, No. 2.

No one can deny that the author has dealt out destruction with impartiality, and it is rather strange, for Mr. Crawford often likes to use his characters for two or even three books; that is why, I think, he got a little tired with these particular people, and determined to bury them. Out of this lot he has kept only three for future vivisection and ultimate extinction.

I trust that, if you have not read the book already, you will be induced, by what I have told you, to get "Casa Braccio," for you will find many interesting human problems discussed in it, and many others suggested for the consideration of the reader. Here, for instance, is a text which may well give you pause, "The widowhood of the unsatisfied is hell, compared with the bereavement of complete possession."

Now what do you say to that? For I am sure the somewhat bald, if not positively repellent, look and sound of the words, will not deter you from considering the truth or falseness of the statement. I do not altogether like the theory; and one may even be permitted to differ from the conclusion contained in the text. But the reason why this sentence arrested my attention is because you quote, "*L'absence ni le temps ne sont rien quand on aime*," and later, you appeal to the East as a place of broader views, of deeper feeling, of longer, wider experience than the West. You appeal to the East, and this is what a Persian poet says:—

> "All that is by nature twain,
> Fears and suffers by the pain
> Of separation—Love is only perfect,
> When itself transcends itself,
> And one with that it loves
> In Undivided Being blends."

Now, how do you reconcile the Western with the Eastern statement, and will either support the "Casa Braccio" theory? You tell me that time and absence count for nothing as between lovers; the Persian says that separation, under these circumstances, is the one calamity most to be dreaded, and that love cannot be perfect without union.

The French writer evidently believed that "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," while the Eastern, without saying, "Out of sight, out of mind," clearly thought that love in absence is a very poor substitute for the passion which sees, hears, and touches the object of its adoration. Undoubtedly the Eastern expressed the feeling, not only of his own countrymen, but of all other Orientals, and probably of Western lovers as well; but if the separation is a matter of necessity, then the Western character, the feeling of loyalty towards and faith in the object of our love, helps us to the belief that "Partings and tears and absence" none need fear, provided the regard is mutual. It is a good creed, and the only one to uphold, but we are not so blind that we cannot see how often it fails to secure even fidelity; while who would deny the Persian's contention that the bond cannot be perfect in absence?

"The widowhood of the unsatisfied is hell, compared with the bereavement of complete possession."

No, certainly, it does not look well. It is hardly worth while to inquire into the bereavement of a complete possession that was not only satisfied but satiated; therefore the comparison must be between perfect love realised, and love that is only not perfected because unrealised. If that is so, then

the text appears to be false in theory, for, inasmuch as nothing earthly can be more perfect than that realisation of mutual affection which the same Persian describes as—

> "She and I no more,
> But in one Undivided Being blended,"—

so the severance of that union by death must be the greatest of human ills.

"The widowhood of the unsatisfied" admits of so many special constructions, each of which would accentuate the despair of the unsatisfied, that it makes the consideration rather difficult, but, in any case, the magnitude of the loss must be imaginative. It is only, therefore, by supposing that no realisation could be so perfect as to equal the ideal of imagination, that the theory of the text could be established. If that be granted, and it were also admitted that the widowhood of this unsatisfied imagination were as hell, compared with "the bereavement of complete possession," that would merely show that "complete possession" is worth very little, and no one need grieve because their longings after a purely imaginary heaven had been widowed before being wedded to the hell of such a disappointing possession.

In any case, I think one is forced to the conclusion that the man (and one must assume it to be a man, in spite of the word "widowhood") who should thus express his feelings would never agree that "*L'absence ni le temps ne sont rien quand on aime;*" that is, of course, supposing he has not got beyond the protesting and unsatisfied stage. Once arrived, he would doubtless subscribe to the phrase with virtuous stolidity. Personally I think, as you probably do, that these words of De Musset give a most charming description of the best form of that true friendship which time cannot weaken nor absence change. For friends it is admirable, for lovers, no.

I have not sought out this riddle for the purpose of airing my own views, but to draw from you an expression of yours. You say my letters are the most tantalising in the world, as I never tell you anything you want to know; just leading up to what most interests you, and then breaking off to something else. If there is nothing in this letter to interest you, at least I have kept to one subject, and I have discussed it as though I were expressing a real opinion! One can hardly do more than that. You see, if I gave you no opportunity of scolding me, you might never write!

VII

THE JINGLING COIN

YOU ask me the meaning of the jingling coin. It was a tale I heard that impressed me, and sometimes comes back with a strange fascination. Did I never tell you? Well, here it is.

I was in India, staying at a hill station, no matter where. I met there a man who for years had spent his holidays in the place, and, walking with him one day up a narrow mountain-path to the top of a hill, whence there was a magnificent view of the Himalayan snows, we passed a small stone slab on which was cut a date. The stone was at a spot where, from the path, was a sheer fall of several hundreds of feet, and as we passed it my companion said—"Look at that. I will tell you what it means when we get to the top."

As we lay on the grass and feasted our eyes upon the incomparable spectacle, before which

earthly lives and troubles seemed so insignificant, my companion told his tale. I now repeat it, as nearly as I can remember, in his own words.

"If I tell you this story," he said, "you must not ask me how I know the details, or seek for any particulars beyond what I give you.

"During one of my many visits to this place, I met a man whom I had seen before and heard a good deal about, for he was one of those people who concern themselves with no one's business but their own, and, therefore, their affairs seem to have a special attraction for the Philistine. He knew that rumour was busy with his name, but beyond the fact that he became more reserved than nature had already made him, the gossip, which was always founded on imagination, sometimes on jealousy, and even malice, seemed to make no impression whatever. That may have been the result of a strong character, but partly, no doubt, it was due to the fact that all his public life had been lived under the fierce light of a criticism that was, in a way, the measure of his success. His friends (and he was fortunate in the possession of particularly loyal friends of both sexes) realised that if, even to them, this man showed little of his real self, he sometimes writhed under calumnies of

which no one knew the authorship, and the existence of which only reached him rarely, through his most intimate friends. For his own reasons he kept his own counsel, and I doubt whether any one knew as much of the real man as I did. A few months before the time I speak of he had made the acquaintance of a girl, or, perhaps I ought to say, a woman, for she was married, who was, with her mother, visiting India. When first the man met this girl he was amazed, and, to some extent, carried away by her extraordinary beauty. But his work took him elsewhere, and, beyond that first impression, which had so powerfully affected him, there was neither time nor opportunity to ascertain whether the lovely exterior was the casket to a priceless jewel, or only the beautiful form harbouring a mindless, soulless, disappointment. She had heard of the man, and while unwilling to be prejudiced by gossip, she was on her guard, and rather afraid of a cynicism which her quick intelligence had noted at their first meeting. Otherwise she was,—womanlike and generous,—curious to see, and to judge for herself, what manner of man this was, against whom more than one indiscreet acquaintance had already warned her.

"Some time elapsed, and then these two found

themselves staying in the same house. The man realised the attractions of the woman's glorious beauty, and he honestly determined that he would neither think, nor look, nor utter any feeling beyond that of ordinary friendship. This resolve he as honestly kept, and, though accident threw in his way every kind of opportunity, and he was constantly alone with the girl, he made no attempt to read her character, to seek her confidence, or to obtain her friendship;—indeed, he charged himself with having been somewhat neglectful in those attentions which make the courtesy of man to woman,—and, when they parted, he questioned whether any man had ever been so much in this woman's society without saying a word that might not have been shouted in the market-place. Somehow the man had an intuitive feeling that gossip had supplied the girl with a not too friendly sketch of him, and he, for once, abandoned the cynicism that, had he cared less, might have prompted him to convey any impression of himself, so long as it should not be the true one. To her this visit said nothing beyond the fact that the man, as she found him, was quite unlike his picture, as painted by professed friends, and that the reality interested her.

"The three Fateful Sisters, who weave the destinies of men and women into such strange tangles, threw these two across each other's paths, until the man, at least, sought to aid Fortune, in providing opportunities for meeting one whose attractive personality appealed so greatly to his artistic sense. Chance helped him, and, again catching together the threads of these lives, Destiny twisted them into a single strand. One brief day, or less, is enough to make a bond that only death can sever, and for this man and woman there were days and days when, in spite of resistance, their lives were gradually drawn so close together that at last the rivets were as strong as they were invisible.

"The triumphant beauty of the woman, rare and disturbing though it was, would not alone have overcome him, but, as the days went by, and they were brought more and more into each other's society, she gradually let him see the greater beauty of her soul; and small wonder if he found the combined attractions irresistible. She was so young that I have called her a girl, and yet she had seen as much of life as many women twice her age. Her beauty and charm of manner had brought her hosts of admirers, but still she was completely

unspoilt, and devoid of either coquetry or self-consciousness. A lovely face, lighted by the winning expression of an intelligent mind and a warm, loving nature; a graceful, willowy figure, whose lissom movements showed a quite uncommon strength and power of endurance; these outward attractions, united to quick discernment, absolute honesty of speech and intention, a bright energy, perfectly unaffected manners, and a courage of the highest order, moral as well as physical, fascinated a man, the business of whose life had been to study his fellow-creatures. He felt certain that he saw here—

"'*La main qui ne trahit, la bouche qui ne ment.*'

"His experience had given him a horror of weakness in every form, and here, he realised, was a woman who was only capable of great thoughts and great deeds, obeying the dictates of her own heart and mind, not the suggestions of the weaker brethren. If she fell, it would be as an angel might fall, through love of one of the sons of men.

"Her shy reserve slowly gave way to confidence, and, in the sympathy of closer friendship, she let him see beauties of soul of which he would have

deemed it sacrilege to speak to another. What drew her to him I cannot tell; perhaps his profound reverence for, and admiration of, her sex, his complete understanding of herself, or perhaps some quality of his own. I had not her confidence, so cannot say; but there were men who recognised his fascination, due in part, no doubt, to his compelling will. Perhaps she was simply carried away by the man's overpowering love, which at last declared itself. They realised the hopelessness of the position, and yet they both took comfort from their mutual love and trust in each other's unchanging faith. That was all they had to look forward to,—that and Fate.

"With that poor prospect before them he gave her, on a day, a gold coin, 'for luck,' he said—an ancient Indian coin of some forgotten dynasty, and she hung it on a bangle and said laughingly, that if ever she were likely to forget him the jingle of the coin would be a ceaseless reminder of the giver. And so the thing lived there day and night, and, when she moved, it made little musical sounds, singing its story to her willing ears, as it struck against the bangle from which it hung.

"Then they came here, he to his work, she to see the snows and some friends, before leaving

India for Japan, or California, or some other stage of the voyage which brings no rest to the troubled soul. One day they had ridden up here, and were returning down the hill. It was afternoon, and she was riding in front, he behind, the syces following. The path is narrow, as you saw, and very steep. She dropped something, stopped, and called a syce to pick it up. Her horse was impatient, got his head round, and, as the syce approached, backed over the edge of the road. The thing was done in an instant, the horse was over the side, down on his belly, terror-struck and struggling in the loose earth. The man had only time to shout, 'Get off! get off!' but she could not get off, the horse had fallen on his off side, and, as the man threw himself on the road, her horse rolled slowly right over her, with a horrible crunching noise,—then faster, over her again, and then horse and rider disappeared, and, crashing through the undergrowth, banging against great granite boulders, fell with a horrible thud, far down the height.

"He had never seen her face; she had her back towards him, and she never uttered a sound.

"The road makes a long détour, and then comes

back, several hundred feet lower down, to a spot almost directly underneath the point where the accident happened. A little way in from there the man saw the horse lying perfectly still, with its neck broken. Higher up the bank he found the woman, moaning a little, but quite unconscious, crushed and torn,—you have seen the place and you can guess. She only lived a few minutes.

"When at last the man awoke out of his stupor, to lift her up and carry her down to the path, he noticed that the bangle and the coin had both gone, wrenched off in that wild plunge through trees and stones into eternity—or oblivion.

"The man waited there, while one of the syces went for help and a litter, and it was only after they had carried her home that I saw him. I could hardly recognise him. There were times when I had thought him the saddest-looking man I had ever seen, but this was different. There was a grey, drawn setness on his face, and something in his eyes I did not care to look at. He and I were living in the same house, and in the evening he told me briefly what had happened, and several times, both while he spoke and afterwards, I saw him throw up his head and listen intently. I asked him what it was, and he said, 'Nothing, I

thought I heard something.' Later, he started suddenly, and said—

"'Did you hear that?'

"'Hear what?' I asked.

"'A faint jingling noise,' he replied. 'You must have heard it; did you do it?'

"But I had heard nothing, and I said so.

"He got up and looked about to see if any one was moving, and then came back and sat down again. I tried to make him go to bed, but he would not, and I left him there at last.

"They buried her the next evening, and all the English in the station were there. The man and I stood on the outskirts of the people, and we lingered till they had gone, and then watched the grave-diggers finish the filling of the grave, put on the sods, and finally leave the place. As they built up the earth, and shaped it into the form of a roof to cover that narrow dwelling, the man winced under every blow of the spades, as though he were receiving them on his own body. There was nothing to say, and we said nothing, but more than once I noticed the man in that listening attitude, and I began to be alarmed about him. I got him home, and except for that look, which had not left his face, and the intentness with which I

sometimes caught him listening, there was nothing strange in his manner; only he hardly spoke at all. On subsequent evenings for the next fortnight he talked more than usual about himself, and as I knew that he often spent a good deal of time in, or looking on to, the cemetery, I was not surprised to hear him say that he thought it a particularly attractive graveyard, and one where it would be pleasant to lie, if one had to be put away somewhere. It is on the hill, you know, by the church, and one can see the eternal snows across that blue valley which divides us from the highlands of Sikkim. He was insistent, and made me remark that, as far as he was concerned, there could be no better place to lie than in this God's Acre.

"Once or twice, again, he asked me if I did not hear a jingle, and constantly, especially in the quiet of evening, I saw him start and listen, till sometimes I really began to think I heard the noise he described.

"A few evenings later, but less than a month after the accident, I went to bed, leaving him cleaning a revolver which he thought a deal of, and certainly he could shoot very straight with it. I was sitting half-undressed, when I heard a loud report, and you may imagine the feelings with

which I ran to the room where I had left him. He was sitting at the table, with his left hand raised, as though to reach his heart, and his right straight down by his side, the revolver on the floor beneath it. He was dead, shot through the heart; but his head was slightly thrown back, his eyes wide open, and in them that look of listening expectancy I had seen so often of late. At the corners of his mouth there seemed to be the shadow of the faintest smile.

"At the inquest I explained that I left him cleaning the pistol, and that, as it had a hair-trigger, no doubt it had gone off by misadventure. When each of the jurors had, in turn, raised the hammer, and found it was hardly necessary to touch the trigger in order to fire the weapon, they unanimously returned a verdict of 'accidental death.'"

"It is curious," concluded my companion, "but I sometimes think *I* hear the jingle of that coin, especially if I am alone on this hill, or sitting by myself at night in the house where that sad accident happened." He put a slight stress on the word "accident," that was not lost on me.

As we passed the stone on our way down the hill, I seemed to see that horse blunder backwards

over the edge of the path, to hear the slow, crunching roll, and then the crash and ghastly thud, far down below; and, as an involuntary shudder crept slowly down my back, I thought *I* heard the faint jingle of that ill-omened piece of gold.

VIII

A STRANGE SUNSET

YOU will think I am eternally babbling of sunsets, but no one, with a spark of feeling, could be here and not be moved to the depths of his nature by the matchless, the ever-changing beauty of the wonderful pictures that are so constantly before his eyes. People who are utterly commonplace, whose instincts seem, in some respects, to approach those of the beasts, when they come here are amazed into new sensations, and, in unaccustomed words, voice the expression of their admiration. If I weary you, pardon me, and remember that you are the only victim of my exaltation.

One looks for a sunset in the west, does one not? and that is the direction in which to find it here as elsewhere; but to-night the marvellous effects of the setting sun were, for a time, confined almost entirely to the east, or, to be strictly

accurate, rather to the south of east. Facing that direction one looks across a remarkable ridge, entirely covered by giant forest trees. The ridge dips in a sort of crescent from about 4500 feet in height at one extremity to 3000 feet at the other, and extends for a distance of perhaps two miles between the horns. Beyond and below the ridge lies a great, fertile valley, watered by a stately river, along the opposite bank of which runs a range of hills, varying in height from 2000 to 3000 feet. Behind these hills there is another valley, another range, and then a succession of ever-loftier mountains, forming the main chain.

The sun had disappeared behind a thick bank of grey clouds, and the only evidence of his presence was in the lambent edges of these clouds, which here and there glittered like molten metal. The western sky was, except for this bank, extraordinarily clear and cloudless, of a pale translucent blue, flecked here and there by tiny cloud-boats, airy and delicate, moving very slowly across the empyrean. I noticed this because what I saw in the east was so remarkable that I noted every detail.

Against a background the colour of a hedge-sparrow's egg in the south, and blue without the

green in the east, stood one white cloud, like a huge plume, with its base resting on the many ranges across the river, while it seemed to lean towards me, the top of the plume being almost over my head. At first the plume shone, from base to top, with a golden effulgence; but this gradually gave place to that lovely tint which I can only describe as *rose dorée*, the warm colour momentarily intensifying in tone until it suffused the entire cloud with such a roseate blush that all the hills beneath, and all the fast-darkening plain, blushed in response.

For twenty minutes that glowing plume of softly rounded, feathery cloud stood framed against its wondrous blue-green background, the rosy colour of the cloud deepening as the land beneath it gathered blackness. Then, almost imperceptibly, the glow flickered and died, leaving only an immense grey-white cloud hanging over the night-shrouded plain.

The sun, I knew, had long sunk beneath the horizon. Though I could see nothing behind that thick curtain of cloud, I waited, for the after-glow, seen from this height, is often more wonderful than the actual sunset. Five minutes of dull greyness, and then the whole western sky, for

a space above the horizon, was overspread with pale gold, while countless shafts of brighter light radiated, as from the hub of the Sun-God's chariot-wheel, across the gilded space, into the blue heights above. In the midst of this pale golden sheen there appeared, almost due west, and low down in the sky, a silver crescent, fine as a thread, curved upwards like the lip of a cup of which bowl and stem were invisible. It was the new-born moon.

Gradually all sunlight failed, and close above the long, narrow bank of dark clouds, clearly etched against their grey background, hung a now golden crescent, into which seemed to be falling a solitary star of surpassing brilliance.

To stand alone here in the presence of Nature, to witness the marvels of sunrise or sunset, the strange influence of nights of ravishing moonlight and days of quickening heat, impresses one with the conviction that if Oriental language is couched in terms that sound extravagant to Western ears, the reason is not far to seek. Nature revels here; one can really see things grow, where the sun shines every day as it never shines in lands of cold and fog. Natural phenomena are on a grander scale; the lightning is more vivid, the

thunder more deafening, the rain a deluge against which the feeble artifices of man offer no protection. The moonlight is brighter, the shadows deeper, the darkness blacker than in northern climes. So the vegetation covers the earth, climbs on to the rocks, and disputes possession even with the waters of the sea. The blossoms are as brilliant in colour as they are profuse in quantity, and two men will stagger under the weight of a single fruit. As for thorns, they are long as nails, stiff as steel, and sharp as needles. The beasts of the forest are mighty, the birds of the air are of wonderful plumage, the denizens of the deep are many, and huge, and strange. In the lower forms of life it is just the same; the lizards, the beetles, the ants, the moths and butterflies, the frogs and the snakes,—they are great in size and legion in number. Even the insects, however small, are in myriads.

Only man stagnates, propagates feebly, loses his arts, falls a prey to pestilence, to new diseases, to imported vices, dies,—while every creature and every plant around him is struggling in the ceaseless renewal of life. Man dies, possibly because exultant nature leaves him so little to do to support his own existence; but it is not strange that,

when he goes beyond the ordinary avocations of daily life, and takes himself at all seriously, his language should partake somewhat of the colour of his surroundings. Nor, perhaps, is it altogether surprising that, living with the tiger and the crocodile, the cobra and the stinging-ray, the scorpion and the centipede, he should have acquired some of their bloodthirstiness and venom, rather than have sought an example in the gentleness of the dove, a bird much fancied by Eastern peoples for the sweetness of its note and the excellence of its fighting qualities.

I suppose it is the appalling difficulties of making a passage through the jungle that have given the elephant and rhinoceros their strength and courage; but for the people, who are never really cold, and seldom hungry, there is little inducement to exertion. They can lie under the fruit trees, and idly watch the grey, gossamer-winged butterflies floating dreamily across a sunlit glade; they drowse and sleep to the music of the waters, as the whispering river slips gently towards a summer sea.

And it is all so comfortable. There is Death, but that is predestined, the one thing certain in so much that is too hard for the finite mind

There is also Hell, but of all those who speak so glibly of it, none ever believes that the same Power which created him, to live for a moment in trouble on the earth, will condemn him to an eternity of awful punishment. It is Paradise for which each man, in his own mind, is destined; a Paradise where he will be rewarded for all his earthly disappointments by some such pleasant material advantages as he can picture to himself, while he lies on the river bank and gradually sinks into a delightful slumber, lulled by the restful rippling of the passing stream. And he will dream—dream of that Celestial Being of whom it is related that "his face shone golden, like that of a god, so that many lizards fell, dazzled, from the walls, and the cockroaches in the thatch fought to bask in the light of his countenance."

Oriental imagery,—but a quaintly pretty idea, the creatures struggling to sit in the light shed by that radiant face.

IX

OF LETTER-WRITING

SO you prefer the unaddressed letters, such as you have seen, to those which you receive from me in a cover, whereon are duly inscribed your name, style, and titles, and you ask me whether some of the letters are not really written to you. They are written to "Mary, in heaven," or to you, if you please, or to any one to whom they appeal. The reason why you prefer them to the epistles I address to you is because they are unconstrained (too much so, you might think, if you saw them all), while, in writing to you, I am under constraint, and, directly I feel it, I have to be careful what I say, and beat about for some safe subject; and, as I abhor gossip and cannot write about my neighbour's cat, I become unnatural, stilted, stupid, boring. With Mary it is different, for she is in heaven, where there are no marriages, and, therefore, I imagine, no husbands. As for

lovers, I do not mind them, for they have no special privileges, at any rate, they have no right to interfere with me. The idea that what I write for your eye may be read by some one for whom it was not intended, hampers the pen and takes away more than half the pleasure of writing.

If you answer, "You ought not to want to write anything to me that may not be read by the master over my shoulder, or by the maid in the kitchen," I say that I do not wish to interfere with the circulation of the *Family Herald;* and, for the rest, when you honour me with a letter, is it to be shown to any one who wishes to know what a really charming and interesting letter is like? I am blessed with some really delightful correspondents, of whom I would say you are the chief, did I not fear to offend some others; but I cannot help noticing, sometimes with amusement and sometimes with painful regret, that the character of their letters has a way of changing that, between first and last, may be compared to looking at the landscape through one end of a telescope and then through the other. When I see the field of vision narrowing to something like vanishing-point, until, in fact, the features of interest are no longer visible, I feel that I too must put on a minifying-glass,

before I attempt to describe to you my surroundings, my thoughts, my hopes and fears. Worst of all, I can no longer ask you freely how life is treating you; for if I do, I get no answer, or you tell me that the winter has been one of unexampled severity, or the political party in power seems to be losing ground and missing its opportunities. Individuals and parties have been losing opportunities since the days when Joseph lost his coat; always regretting them and always doing it again, because every party and every individual scorns to profit by the experience of another. That, you will tell me, is a platitude beneath a child's notice. I agree with you, and I only mention it in support of my contention that it is better to write what you see, or hear, or imagine, or believe, to no one at all, than to write "delicately," with the knowledge that there is a possible Samuel waiting somewhere about, if not to hew you in pieces, to put inconvenient questions to your friends, and give them the trouble of making explanations which are none the less aggravating because they are needless. As a man, I may say that the effort to avoid writing to women everything that can, by a suspicious mind, be twisted into something mildly compromising, is more than I am capable of. The

thought that one may innocently get a friend into trouble is not amusing, so pray dismiss from your mind the idea that any of these letters are written to you. They are not; and if they ever recall scenes, or suggest situations that seem familiar, that is merely an accident. Pure, undiluted fable is, I fancy, very rare indeed; but travellers are supposed to be responsible for the most of it, and I am a traveller. On the other hand, almost all fiction is founded on fact, but you know how small a divergence from the latter is sufficient to make the former. If my fiction looks like fact, I am gratified; if, at the same time, it has awakened your interest (and you say it has), that is more than I ever hoped to achieve. A wanderer's life in often beautiful, sometimes strange, surroundings; a near insight into the fortunes of men and women of widely differing race, colour, and creed; and the difficulty of writing freely and fearlessly to those who, like yourself, would give me their sympathy and kindly interest—these are mainly responsible for the Letters. As to the other contributing causes, it will amuse you more to exercise your imagination in lively speculations than to hear the dull truth from me. Besides, if I told you the truth it would only mislead, for you would not believe it.

X

AT A FUNERAL

DO you remember how Matthew Arnold, in his Essay on "Pagan and Mediæval Religious Sentiment," translates a scene from the fifteenth Idyll of Theocritus, giving the experiences of two Syracusan visitors at the feast of Adonis at Alexandria, about three hundred years before the Christian era? The description is wonderfully fresh and realistic, and it came back to me with strange insistence last night when my host detailed to me his experiences at a Malay funeral. I fear the effect will all be lost when I try to repeat what I heard—but you are indulgent, and you will pardon my clumsy periods for the sake of my desire to interest you. My only chance of conveying any idea of the impression made on me is to assume the rôle of narrator at first hand, and to try, as far as I may, to speak in my host's words.

"I was travelling," he said, "and on the point

of starting for a place where lived a Malay raja who was a great friend of mine, when I heard accidentally that his son had just died. That evening I reached the station where my friend lived. I saw him, and learned that his son, a mere lad, would be buried the next day. It is needless to say why he died, it is not a pretty tale. He had visited, perhaps eighteen months earlier, a British possession where the screams of Exeter Hall had drowned the curses of the people of the land, and this wretched boy returned to his country to suffer eighteen months of torture,—agonising, loathsome corruption,—in comparison with which death on the cross would be a joyous festival. That is nothing, he was dead; and, while his and many another life cry to deaf ears, the momentary concern of his family and his friends was to bury him decently. My arrival was regarded as a fortuitous circumstance, and I was bidden to take part in the function.

"It was early afternoon when I found myself, with the father, standing at the window of a long room, full of women, watching till the body should be carried to a great catafalque that stood at the door to receive it. As we waited there, the man beside me,—a man of unusually tender feeling,—

showed no emotion. He simply said, 'I am not sorry; it is better to die than to live like that; he has peace at last.'

"There was a sound of heavy feet staggering over the grass under the weight of a great load, and the coffin was borne past our window towards the door. As we walked down the room a multitude of women and children pressed after us, and while a crowd of men lifted the body into its place on the catafalque, a girl close by us burst into a perfect passion of weeping, intermingled with despairing cries, and expressions of affection for the dead, whom she would never see again. The raja pulled me by the sleeve, saying, 'Come outside, I cannot bear this,' and I saw the tears were slowly coursing down his face as we passed the heart-broken child, who, in the abandonment of her grief, had thrown herself into the arms of another girl, and was weeping hysterically on her breast. The mourner was the dead boy's only sister.

"Meanwhile, the coffin had been placed on the huge wooden bier, and this was now being raised on the shoulders of a hundred men, with at least another hundred crowded round to take turns in carrying it to the place of burial. At this moment

the procession moved off, and anything more unlike a funeral, as you and I know it, would be hard to imagine. A band of musicians, Spanish *mestizos*, in military uniforms, headed the *cortège*, playing a wild Spanish lament, that seemed to sob and wail and proclaim, by every trick of sound, the passing of the dead. Immediately behind them followed a company of stalwart Indian soldiers with arms reversed. Then a posse of priests and holy men chanting prayers. Next we came, and behind us a row of boys carrying their dead master's clothes, a very pathetic spectacle. After them the great bier, vast in size, curious in form, and gay with colour, but so unwieldy that it seemed to take its own direction and make straight for the place of burial, regardless of roads and ditches, shrubs and flowers, or the shouts and cries of its bearers and those who were attempting to direct their steps. Last of all, a crowd of men and boys,—friends, retainers, chiefs, sightseers, idlers, gossips and beggars, a very heterogeneous throng.

"The road to the burial-ground wound down one hill and up another, and the band, the escort, the priests, and the mourners followed it. But the catafalque pursued its own devious course in its

own blundering fashion, and, by-and-by, was set down on a high bluff, o'erlooking a great shining river, with palm-clad banks, backed by a space of level ground shut in by lofty blue hills. The coffin was then lifted from out the bier and placed upon the ground.

"I stood by the ready-dug grave and waited; while the father of the dead boy moved away a few yards, and an aged chief called out, 'Now, all you praying people, come and pray.'

"The raja, the priests, and the holy men gathered round the body, and after several had been invited to take up the word and modestly declined in favour of some better qualified speaker, a voice began to intone, while, from time to time, the rest of the company said 'Amîn.'

"Just then it began to rain a little, and those who had no umbrellas ran for protection to the catafalque and sheltered themselves under its overhanging eaves, while a lively interchange of badinage passed between those who, for the moment, had nothing to do. This was the sort of conversation that reached my ears.

"'Now, then, all you people, come and pray.'

"'Why don't you pray yourself?'

"'We did all our praying yesterday; I don't

believe you have done any. Now is the time, with all these holy men here.'

"'I dare say; but you don't suppose I'm going out into the rain to pray: I'm not a priest.'

"'No one thought you were; but that is no reason why you should not pray.'

"'Never mind about me, tell these other people; but you need not bother now, for they've got it over.'

"And all the time the monotonous voice of the priest muttered the guttural Arabic words, as though these frivolous talkers were a mile off, instead of within a few feet of him and those who stood round the coffin.

"No one could have helped being struck by the curious incongruity of the scene at that moment. I stood in a place of graves, with an open sepulchre at my feet. The stage was one of extraordinary beauty, the players singularly picturesque. That high bluff, above the glistening river, circled by forest-clad hills of varying height, one needle-like point rising to at least 6000 feet. Many old graves lay beneath the shadow of graceful, wide-spreading trees, which carried a perfect blaze of crimson blossoms, lying in huge masses over dark green leaves, as though spread there for effect.

Groups of brown men, clad in garments of bright but harmoniously toned colours, stood all about the hill. On the very edge of the bluff, towards the river, was the gaily caparisoned, quaintly constructed catafalque, a number of men and boys sitting in it and round its edge, smoking, laughing, and talking. Within a dozen feet of them, the closely packed crowd of priests and holy men praying round the coffin. The band and the guard had been told to march off, and they were wending their way round a hillside in middle distance; while the strains of a quick step, the monotone of rapidly uttered prayer, the conversation and laughter of the idlers, crossed and re-crossed each other in a manner that to me was distinctly *bizarre*. Seen against that background and lighted by the fiery rays of a dying Eastern sun, the scarlet uniforms of the bandsmen, the dark blue of the escort, the long white coats of the priests, and the many-coloured garments of the two or three hundred spectators scattered about the graves, completed a picture not easily forgotten.

"Just then a move was made to the sepulchre, and two ropes were stretched across it, while some men began to lift the coffin.

"'What are you doing?' said the uncle of the

dead boy. 'If you put him in like that how will his head lie?'

"The bearers immediately let the coffin down, and another man in authority said, 'Well, after all, how should his head lie?'

"'Towards the west,' said the uncle.

"'No, it should not,' replied the other; 'it should be to the north, and then he looks towards the west.'

"Several people here joined in the argument, and it was eventually decided that the head must be towards the north; and then, as the body was lying on its right side, the face would look towards Mecca.

"'Well, who knows at which end of the box his head is?'

"Various guesses were hazarded, but the uncle said that would never do, and he would see for himself. So the wreaths and garlands of 'blue chempaka,' the flower of death, the gorgeous silks and cloths of gold, were all thrown off, the heavy cover was lifted up, and the uncle began to feel about in the white grave-clothes for the head of the corpse.

"'Ha! here it is,' he said; 'if we had put him in without looking, it would have been all wrong,

and we should have had a nice job to get him out again.'

"'Well, you know all about it now,' said a bystander, 'so we may as well get on.'

"The cover was accordingly replaced, the box turned with the head to the north, and then, with a deal of talk and superabundance of advice, from near and from far, the poor body was at last lowered into the grave. Once there the corpse lies on the earth, for the coffin has no bottom. The reason is obvious.

"You have probably never been to a funeral, and if so, you do not know the horrible sound of the first spadesful of earth as they fall, with dull blows, on that which is past feeling and resistance. The friends who stand round the grave shudder as each clod strikes the wood under which lies their beloved dead. Here it was different, for two men got into the grave and held up a grass mat, against which the earth was shovelled while the coffin was protected. There was hardly any sound, and, as the earth accumulated, the men spread it with their hands to right and left, and finally over the top of the coffin, and then the rest of the work was done rapidly and quietly. When filled in, two wooden pegs, each covered

with a piece of new white cloth, were placed at the head and foot of the grave. These are eventually replaced by stones.

"Then, as the officers of the raja's household began to distribute funeral gifts amongst the priests, the holy men, and the poor, my friend and I slowly retraced our steps, and, with much quiet dignity, the father thanked me for joining him in performing the last offices to his dead son.

"'His sufferings were unbearable,' he said; 'they are over now, and why should I regret?'

"Truly death was best, I could not gainsay it; but that young life, so horribly and prematurely ended, seemed to have fallen into the snare of a civilisation that cannot be wholly appreciated by primitive people. They do not understand why the burning moral principles of a section of an alien race should be applied to communities that have no sympathy with the principles, or their application to different conditions of society."

XI

OF CHANGE AND DECAY

THERE is a subject which has an abiding interest for all men and women who are not too old to love; it is Constancy. I suppose there are few questions on which any half-dozen intelligent people will express such different opinions, and it is doubtful whether any of the six (unless there be amongst them one who is very young and inexperienced) will divulge his, or her, true thoughts thereanent. Almost all women, and most men, seem to think they are morally bound to declare themselves to be very mirrors of constancy, and each is prepared to shower scorn and indignation on the erring mortal convicted of change of feeling. The only feeling I here refer to is the declared love of man for woman, of woman for man.

The other day a friend, writing to me, said, with admirable candour, "Do not think my heart

is so small that it can only contain love for one man," and I know that she means one man at a time. The maze surrounding this suggestion is attractive; let us wander in it for awhile, and if we become bewildered in its devious turns, if we lose ourselves in the intricacies of vague phrases, we may yet win our way back to reason by the road of hard, practical fact.

In the spring of life, when the fancies of the young man and the girl "lightly turn to thoughts of love," I suppose the average lover honestly believes in the doctrine of eternal constancy, for himself and the object of his affections, and words will almost fail him and her to describe their contempt for the frail creature who has admitted a change of mind; worse still, if the change includes a confession of love for a new object. Coquette, jilt, faithless deceiver, breaker of hearts, ruthless destroyer of peace of mind,—words of opprobrium are not sufficient in quantity, or poisonous enough in quality, to satisfy those from whose lips they flow with the violence and destructive force of a river in flood.

Now, suppose this heaven-mated couple proceeds to extremities—that is, to marriage. And suppose that, after quite a short time, so short

that no false note has ever been heard to mar the perfect harmony of their duet of mutual praise and rapture, one of them dies, or goes mad, or gets lost, or is put into prison for a long term of years;—will not the other find a new affinity? It happens so often that I think it must be admitted as a very likely possibility. When convention permits of an outward and visible application, and plaster is put over the wound, most of the very virtuous say, "and an excellent thing, too."

There, then, we arrive at once at the possibility of change; the possibility of A, who once swore deathless love and fealty to B, swearing the same deathless love and fealty to X. It happens, and it has high approval.

Now go a little step further, and suppose that the excellent couple of whom I first spoke perpetrate matrimony, and neither of them dies, or goes mad, or gets into prison. Only, after a longer or shorter time, they become utterly bored with each other; or one finds the other out; or, what is most common, one, and that one usually the woman, for divers reasons, comes to loathe the married state, all it implies and all it exacts. Just then Satan supplies another and a quite different man, who falls naturally into his place

in the situation, and the play runs merrily along. B's deathless love and fealty for A are thrown out of the window, and what remains is pledged, up to the very hilt, to that spawn of the Evil One, the wrecker of happy homes, *Z*. It can hardly be denied that this also happens.

I come, then, to the case of the affianced but unmarried lovers, where one, or both, perceives in time that the other is not quite *all* that fancy painted; realises that there is a lover, "for showy," and a disagreeable companion and master "for blowy": a helpful daughter, a charming sweetheart one day, and a very selfish, not to say grasping, spit-fire on another. Or, across the distant horizon, there sails into the quiet waters of this love-locked sea a privateer, with attractions not possessed by the ordinary merchant vessel, and, when the privateer spreads its sails again, it carries with it a willing prize, leaving behind a possibly better-found and more seaworthy craft to indulge its wooden frame with a burst of impotent fury and despair. B's deathless love has been transplanted to a more congenial soil, and, after a space, A will find another and a better helpmate, and both will be satisfied, —for a time.

If one may love, and marry, and lose, and love again; if one may love, and promise to marry, but, seeing the promise means disaster, withdraw it, to love elsewhere; if one may love and the love be choked to death, or frozen to entire absence of feeling, and then revive under the warmth of new sympathy to live and feel again —if all these things may be, and those to whom the experience comes are held to be no more criminal than their fellows, surely there may be love, real love, honestly given with both hands, as honestly clasped and held, and yet—and yet —a time may come when, for one of a thousand reasons, or for two or three, that love will wane and wane until, from illumining the whole firmament of those within its radiance, it disappears and leaves nothing but black, moonless night. But, by-and-by, a new moon of love may rise, may wax to equal splendour, making as glorious as before everything on which it shines; and the heart, forgetting none of the past, rejoices again in the present, and says, "Life is good; let me live it as it comes." If that be possible, the alternate day and night of love and loss may succeed each other more than twice or thrice, and yet no charge, even of fickleness, may fairly lie

at the door of him or her to whom this fate may come unsought.

To love, as some can love, and be loved as well in return; to trust in the unswerving faith, the unassailable loyalty, the unbounded devotion of another, as one trusts in God, in the simple laws of nature, in anything that is absolutely certain; and then to find that our deity has feet of clay, that our perfect gem has, after all, a flaw, is a very bad experience. Worse than all, to lose, absolutely and for ever, and yet without death, a love that seemed more firmly rooted and grounded in us than any sacred principle, more surely ours than any possession secured by bolt and bar—that is a pain that passeth the understanding of those who have not felt it. Add to this the knowledge that this curse has come upon us as the result of our own work—folly, blind, senseless, reckless confidence, or worse—that is the very acme of human suffering. It is not a thing to dwell upon. On the grave of a love that has surpassed, in the perfection of its reality, all the dreams of imagination, and every ideal conjured out of depths of passionate romance, grow weeds which poison the air and madden the brain with grisly spectres. It is well to "let the dead bury their dead"—if we only can.

There, I am at the end; or is it only the close of a chapter? I suppose it must be the latter, for I have but now come to my friend's proposition, namely, that of love distributed amongst a number of objects; all perhaps different, yet all in their way, let us hope, equally worthy. I know how she explains it. She says she loves one man because he appeals to her in one way, another in another; and as there are many means of approach to her heart, so there are many who, by one road or another, find their way to it. After all, she is probably more candid than singular in the distribution of her affection. How many worldlings who have reached the age of thirty can say that they have not had a varied experience in the elasticity of their affections, in the variety of shrines at which they have worshipped? Aphrodite and Athene and Artemis for the men; Phœbus and Ares and Hermes for the women; and a host of minor deities for either. Minor chords, delicate harmonies, charming pages of melody between the tragic scenes, the carefully scored numbers, the studied effects, which introduce the distinguishing *motifs* of the leading characters, in that strange conception wherein is written all the music of their lives.

We are told that the sons of God took unto themselves wives from the daughters of men. Do you believe they left no wives, no broken faith, in heaven, before they came to earth to seek what they could not find above the spheres? What form of marriage ceremony do you suppose they went through with those daughters of men? Was it binding until death, and did that last trifling incident only open the door to an eternity of wedded bliss in the heaven from which earthly love had been able to seduce these sons of God? I fear there is proof of inconstancy somewhere. There is clear evidence of a desire for change, and that is usually taken to be a synonym for inconstancy, as between the sexes. The daughters of men have something to answer for, much to be proud of; but I hardly see why either they, or their menkind, who never drew any loving souls down from the safe heights of heaven to be wives to them, should be expected to make a choice of a partner early in life and never waver in devotion to that one, until death has put them beyond the possibility of temptation. It does happen sometimes; it is beautiful, enviable, and worthy of all praise. But when the heart of man or woman, following that most universal law of nature, change,

goes through the whole gamut of feeling, from indifference to passionate love, and later retraces its steps, going back over only a few of them, or to a place, beyond indifference, where dislike is reached, there seems no good reason why that disappointed, disillusioned soul should be made the object of reproach, or the mark for stones, cast by others who have already gone through the same experience or have yet to learn it.

If we claim immortality, I think we must admit our mutability. Perhaps the fault is not all ours. It is written :—

"Alas for those who, having tasted once
Of that forbidden vintage of the lips
That, press'd and pressing, from each other draw
The draught that so intoxicates them both,
That, while upon the wings of Day and Night
Time rustles on, and Moons do wax and wane,
As from the very Well of Life they drink,
And, drinking, fancy they shall never drain.
But rolling Heaven from His ambush whispers,
So in my licence is it not set down :
Ah for the sweet societies I make
At Morning, and before the Nightfall break ;
Ah for the bliss that coming Night fills up,
And Morn looks in to find an empty Cup !"

I do not seek to persuade you ; it is a subject we often discuss, on which we never agree. I only state the facts as I know them, and I am

for the truth!—even though I wish it were not true—rather than for a well-sounding pretence, which usually covers a lie. I have believed; I have seen what, with my life, I would have maintained was perfect, changeless love; and I have seen that love bestowed, in apparently equal measure, on another; while, sometimes, the first affection has died utterly, or, at others, it has never died at all, and the wavering heart, divided in allegiance, has suffered agonies of remorse, and at last begged one object of its devotion to shun it for ever, and so help it "to be true to some one."

There you find a result almost the same as that so candidly confessed by my friend; but the phases through which either will pass to arrive at it are utterly different. Fate and circumstances, the prolonged absence of the lover, misunderstandings, silence, and the ceaseless, wearing efforts of another to take the place of the absent—the absent, who is always wrong;—these things will loosen the tightest bond, when once the enemy at the gate has established a feeling of sympathy between himself and the beleaguered city. If at last there is a capitulation, it is only when the besieged is *au bout de ressources;* only made in extreme distress,

only perhaps under a belief of abandonment by one on whom the city relied for assistance in its dire need.

My candid friend has no regrets, passes through no phases of feeling, sees no harm, means none, and for herself is probably safe. Only her heart is large and warm; she desires sympathy, intellectual companionship, amusement, passionate adoration. She gets these things, but not all from the same man, and she is prepared to give love in return for each, but it is love with a wise reservation. Sometimes she cannot understand why the objects of her catholic affections are not equally satisfied with the arrangement, and she thinks their discontent is unreasonable. She will learn. Possibly, as she acquires knowledge, she may change. Nothing is more certain than that there is, if not always, very very often, the widest difference in the world between the girl of twenty and the woman of thirty. It is a development, an evolution,—often a startling one,—and if men more often realised what is likely to come, waited for it, and understood it when it arrived, there would be a deal less unhappiness in the world.

That, however, is another question, about which

I should like to talk to you on another day, for it has interest.

Of love, and change in the object of love, I think you will not deny the possibility. If you have never known such change, you are the exception, and out of your strength you can afford to deal gently with those weaker vessels whose feelings have gone through several experiences. But has your faith never wavered? Have your affections been set on one man, and one only; and are they there to-day, as strong, as single-hearted, as true and as contented as ever? I wonder; pardon me if I also doubt!

I have spoken only of those cases where the love that was has ceased to be; ceased altogether and gone elsewhere, or so changed from what it was, that it no longer knits together those it once held to the exclusion of all others. But I might remind you that there are many other phases, all of which imply change, or at least such difference as must be counted faithlessness. Your quick intelligence can supply a multitude of instances from the unfortunate experiences of your friends, and I will only cite one that is not altogether unheard of. It is this; when two people are bound by the ties of mutual love, and fate divides them by time and distance, it sometimes happens

that one will prove faithless in heart, while remaining firmly constant in deed. That is usually the woman. The other may be faithless in deed; but he says to himself (and, if he has to confess his backsliding, he will swear the same to his lady) that his affections have never wavered. He often does not realise that this statement, the truth of which he takes such trouble to impress upon his outraged goddess, adds to the baseness of his deed. It is curious, but it is true, that the woman, if she believes, will pardon that offence, while she would not forgive the heart-faithlessness of which she is herself guilty. He is not likely to learn that her fealty has wandered; he takes a good deal for granted, and he does not easily believe that such things are possible where he is concerned; but, should he suspect it, should she even admit that another has aroused in her feelings akin to those she had hitherto only felt for him, he will hold that aberration from the path of faith rather lightly, though neither tears nor blood could atone for a faithless deed, such as that of which he stands convicted.

Woman realises that if man's lower nature takes him into the gutter, or even less unclean places, he will not hanker after whatever it was that attracted

him when once his temptation is out of sight. She despises, but she estimates the disloyalty at its right value in a creature for whose want of refinement she learns to feel a certain contempt. Man, busy about many other things, treats as trivial a lapse which implies no smirch on his honour; and he, knowing himself and judging thereby, says, "Out of sight, out of mind." It seldom occurs to him that, where the woman's heart has been given away from him, he has already lost at least as much as his utmost dread; and even that is more likely to follow, than he to return to one who has never aroused in him any feeling of which he cares to think. Therefore, he is inclined rather to be amused than distressed; and, still mindful of his own experiences, he dismisses the matter from his thoughts with almost a sense of satisfaction. But he is wrong: is he not?

Of course I am not thinking of the jealous men. They are impossible people whom no one pities. They never see that, while they make themselves hateful to every one who is unhappily thrown into contact with them, they only secure their own misery. I believe there are men who are jealous of the door-mat. These are beyond the help of prayer.

XII

DAUGHTERS AND DESPOTISM

I AGREE with you that few things are more astonishing than the want of sympathy between parents and their daughters. Many fathers and mothers seem to be absolutely insensible to the thoughts, the desires, and the aspirations of those for whom they usually profess, and probably feel, a very great affection. There are two principal causes for this very common state of matters. One is the difference in age between parents and children. The fathers and mothers are losing, or have already lost, their interest in many of those things which are just beginning to most keenly interest their children. The children are very quick to see this, and the confidence they will give to a comparative stranger they withhold from parents, to whom they are too shy to confess themselves, because they dread ridicule, coldness, displeasure. The other cause of estrangement is

the fact that parents will insist upon regarding their daughters as children until they marry, and sometimes even afterwards; and they are so accustomed to ordering and being obeyed, that they cannot understand independence of thought. Their children are always children to them; they must do exactly what they are told without question; they ought not to have any ideas of their own, and, if they are really good Christian children, well brought up and a credit to their parents, they must, before all things, be obedient and have no likes and dislikes, no opinions that are not those of their parents. As with crows, they must be feathered like the old birds and caw, always and only caw, if they wish to be heard at all.

It sounds, and it seems, unreasonable, and yet one sees it every day, and the amused or enraged spectator, with no fledglings of his own, is lost in wonderment at the crass stupidity of otherwise sensible people, who, while they do these things themselves, and glory in their own shame, will invite attention to the mote in their neighbour's eye, which ought to be invisible to them by reason of the great beam in their own. I suppose it never occurs to them that they are all

the time committing hateful and unpardonable crimes; that their want of intelligent appreciation is driving their children to resort to all kinds of concealment, subterfuge, and deceit; while home becomes often so hateful to a girl that she seizes the first opportunity of leaving it, and makes her life a long misery or something worse.

If the spectator dared, or cared, to speak the naked truth to a parent, I can imagine that dignified individual choking with respectable rage at the bare suggestion that he was in any sense responsible for his daughter's regrettable conduct. Yet surely the father and the mother are blameworthy, if they decline to treat their grown-up daughters as intelligent creatures, with the instincts, the yearnings, the passions for which they are less responsible than their parents. "You must do this, because I was made to do it; and you must not do that, because I was never allowed to do it. You must never question my directions, because they are for your good; because you are younger than I am, and cannot therefore know as well as I do; because I am your mother and you are my daughter; and, in my day, daughters never questioned their mothers." All this, and a great deal more, may be admirable;

but it does not seem so. It may even answer sometimes; but that is rather cause for surprise than congratulation. It does fail, often and badly; but the parents are the last to realise the fact, and probably nothing would ever persuade them that the failure is due to their methods. If ever it comes home to parents that their revolted children have grown to hate them, they call them "unnatural," and almost expect the earth to open and swallow them up, as happened to Korah and all his company.

To onlookers the position often seems intolerable, and they avoid it, lest they should be tempted to interfere and so make matters worse. Nowadays, intelligent opinion is not surprised when tyranny is followed by rebellion. The world is getting even beyond that phase. Both men and women demand that their opinions should be heard; and where, amongst English-speaking people, they can be shown to be in accordance with common-sense, with freedom of thought, and with what are called the Rights of Man, they usually prevail. Children do not often complain of tyranny, and they seldom revolt; but they bitterly resent being treated as if they were ten years old when they are twenty, when their intelligence, their educa-

tion, and even their knowledge of the world entitle them to hold and express opinions. Nay, more, they are conscious of what is due to their own self-esteem, their family, and their order; and there are better ways of keeping them true to high purposes and lofty ideals than by treating them as children, whose intentions must always be suspected, because prone to naughtiness. The finer feelings are often strongest in youth; life and its experiences blunt them. While they are there, it is well to encourage them. Sympathy from an equal can easily do that; but, unless equality in speech be granted, the being who is held in bondage will be shy to express thoughts and aspirations that may be ridiculed, and will also resent the position of inferiority to which he or she is relegated for reasonless reasons.

In the relations between parents and children, perhaps the most surprising point is the absolute disregard of the pitiless vengeance of heredity. Men and women seem to forget that some of their ancestors' least attractive attributes may appear in their descendants, after sparing a child or skipping a generation. The guiding traits (whether for good or evil) in most characters can be traced with unerring accuracy to an ancestor, where there

is any record of family history. One child is predestined to be a musician, another a soldier, and a third a commonplace or remarkable sinner. Identical methods of education and treatment may not suit all equally well. Because a parent has lived only one life, the half-dozen children for whom he is responsible may not, even in the natural course of events, turn out to be exact replicas of their father, nor thrive on the food which reared him to perfection.

I do not pretend that there are not many exceptions; but the daughters who are the victims of parental zeal, or parental repression, are so numerous that, in England at any rate, they probably form the majority of their kind. Of those who marry, the greater number may be entirely well-mated. Every one must hope that it is so. Some there are who are not so fortunate; and some, again, begin well but end in disaster,—due to their own mistakes and defects, to those of their husbands, or to unkind circumstances. With the daughters who are favoured by Fortune we have no concern. For the others, there is only one aspect of their case with which I will bore you, and that because it seems to me to be to some extent a corollary to my last letter. If a

girl has ideas and intelligence beyond those of her parents; if she has felt constraint and resented it; if she has exercised self-repression, while she longed for sympathy, for expansion, for a measure of freedom—such an experience, especially if it has lasted for any time, is not the best preparation for marriage. Married life—where man and woman are in complete sympathy, where mutual affection and admiration make self-sacrifice a joy, and trouble taken for the other a real satisfaction—is not altogether an easy path to tread, with sure and willing feet, from the altar to the grave. Many would give much to be able to turn back: but there is no return. So some faint and others die; some never cease from quarrelling; some accept the inevitable and lose all interest in life; while a few get off the road, over the barriers, break their necks or their hearts, or simply disappear out of the ken, beyond the vision, of their kind.

I think much of the unhappiness that comes to be a millstone round the necks of married people is due, primarily, to the deep ignorance of womankind so commonly displayed by mankind. It is a subject that is not taught, probably because no man would be found conceited enough to profess more than the most superficial knowledge of it.

Some Eastern writers have gone into the question, but their point of view differs from ours, as do their climate, their religion, their temperament, habits, and moral code. Their teachings are difficult to obtain; they are written in languages not commonly understood, and they deal with races and societies that have little in common with Europeans. Michelet has, however, produced a book that may be read with advantage by all those who wish to acquire a few grains of knowledge on a subject that has such an enthralling interest at some period of most men's lives. It is not exactly easy to indicate other aids to an adequate conception of the feminine gender, but they will not be found in the streets and gutters of great cities.

The school-boy shuns girls. He is parlously ignorant of all that concerns them, except that they cannot compete with him in strength and endurance. He first despises them for their comparative physical weakness; then, as he grows a little older, a certain shyness of the other sex seizes him; but this usually disappears with the coming of real manhood, when his instincts prompt him to seek women's society. What he learns then, unless he is very fortunate, will not help

him to understand and fully appreciate the girl who somewhat later becomes his wife—indeed, it is more likely to mislead him and contribute to her unhappiness. Unite this inexperienced, or over-experienced, youth with the girl who is ready to accept almost any one who will take her from an uncongenial home, and it says a good deal for the Western world that the extraordinary difficulties of the position should, in so large a proportion of cases, be overcome as well as they are.

In the rage for higher education, why does not some philanthropic lady, some many-times-married man, open a seminary for the instruction of inexperienced men who wish to take into their homes, for life and death, companions, of whose sex generally, their refined instincts, tender feelings, reckless impulses, strange cravings, changeful moods, overpowering curiosity, attitudes of mind, methods of attack and defence, signals of determined resistance or speedy capitulation, they know, perhaps, as little as of the Grand Llama. What an opportunity such a school would afford to the latest development of woman to impress her own views upon the rising generation of men! How easily she might mould them to her fancy, or, at least, plant in them seeds of repentance, apprecia-

tion, and constancy, to grow up under the care of wives for whose society the Benedictentiary would have somewhat fitted them.

It is really an excellent idea, this combination of Reformatory of the old man and Education of the new. Can you not see all the newspapers full of advertisements like this :—

Preparation of Gentlemen for Matrimony

The great success which has attended all those who have gone through the course of study at the Benedictentiary of Mesdames —— has led the proprietors to add another wing to this popular institution. The buildings are situated in park-like grounds, far from any disturbing influences. The lecturers are ladies of personal attraction with wide experience, and the discipline of the establishment is of the severest kind compatible with comfort. A special feature of this institution is the means afforded for healthy recreation of all kinds, the object being to make the students attractive in every sense. Gentlemen over fifty years of age are only admitted on terms which can be learnt by application to the Principal. These terms will vary according to the character of the applicant. During the last season twenty-five of Mesdames —— pupils made brilliant marriages, and the most flattering testimonials are constantly being received from the wives

of former students. There are only a few vacancies, and application should be made at once to the Principal.

That is the sort of thing. Do you know any experienced lady in want of a vocation that might combine profit with highly interesting employment? You can give her this suggestion, but advise her to be careful in her choice of lecturers, and let the ladies combine the wisdom of the serpent with the gentle cooing of the dove; otherwise, some possible husbands might be spoilt in the making.

XIII

HER FIANCÉ

YOU say that my opinions are very unorthodox, that my views on human constancy are cynical, and that it is wicked to sympathise with children who oppose their inclinations to the behests of their parents.

Do you forget that I said we should not agree, and will you be angry if I venture to suggest that you have not read my letters very carefully, or that your sense of justice is temporarily obscured? If I dared, I would ask you to look again at the letters, and then tell me exactly wherein I have sinned. I maintained that all are not gifted with that perfect constancy which distinguished Helen and Guinevere, and a few other noble ladies whose names occur to me. I notice that, as regards yourself, you disdain to answer my question, and we might safely discuss the subject without reference to personal considerations.

My regrets over the strained relations which sometimes exist between parents and children could hardly be construed into an incitement to rebellion. They did not amount to more than a statement of lamentable facts, and a diagnosis of the causes of the trouble. When you add that truth is often disagreeable and better left unspoken, I will subscribe to the general principle, but fail to see its application here. Nor can I agree with you that problems of this sort are lacking in interest. To be able to construct a geometrical figure, and prove that the method is correct, does not sound very interesting; but architects, who have knowledge of this kind, have achieved results that appeal to those who look at the finished work, without thought of the means by which the end was gained.

With your permission, I will move the inquiry to new ground; and do not think I am wavering in my allegiance, or that my loyalty is open to doubt, if I say one word on behalf of man, whose unstable affections are so widely recognised that no sensible person would seek to dispute the verdict of all the ages. He is represented as loving a sex rather than an individual; is likened to the bee which sucks where sweetness can be

found and only whilst it lasts; he shares with the butterfly the habit of never resting long on any flower, and, like it, he is drawn by brilliant colouring and less clean attractions. Virtuous affection and plain solid worth do not appeal to him.

These are articles of popular belief, and must not be questioned; but I may say to you, that they do the poor man somewhat less than justice. As a bachelor, he has few opportunities of examining virtuous affection, on his own account; the experiences of his friends are not always encouraging; and, if he has to work, other things absorb most of his attention at this stage of his existence. If he marries, especially if he marries young, he is often enthusiastic, and usually hopelessly ignorant of feminine methods, inclinations, and fastidious hesitation. He feels an honest, blundering, but real and passionate affection. He shows it, and that is not seldom an offence. He looks for a reciprocation of his passion, and when, as often happens, he fully realises that his transports awaken no responsive feeling, but rather a scarcely veiled disgust, his enthusiasm wanes, he cultivates self-repression, and assumes a chilly indifference that, in time, becomes the true expres-

sion of his changed feelings. From this keen disappointment, this sense of his own failure in his own home, the transition to a state of callousness, and thence, to one of deep interest in another object where his advances are met in a different spirit, is not very difficult.

You see, I am taking for granted that the popular conception of his shortcomings in regard to the affections is correct, and I only want to suggest some of the reasons which have earned for him such a bad reputation. First, it is the fault of his nature, for which he is not altogether responsible; it is different to yours. In this respect he starts somewhat unfairly handicapped, if his running is tried by the same standard as that fixed for the gentler sex. Then his education, not so much in the acquirement of book-knowledge as in the ways of the world, is also different. His physical robustness is thought to qualify him, when still a boy, to go anywhere, to see everything at close quarters, and without a chaperone. He is thrown into the maelstrom of life, and there he is practically left to sink or swim; and whether he drown or survive, he must pass through the deep water where only his own efforts will save him. A few disappear altogether,

and, while all get wet, some come out covered with mud, and others are maimed, or their constitutions permanently injured by the immersion.

That is the beginning, and I think you will admit that, except in a few very peculiar cases, the boy's early life is more calculated to smirch than to preserve his original innocence.

Then he settles down to work for a living or for ambition, and, in either case, he is left but little time to study the very complex complement of his life, woman. If he does not incontinently fall in love with what appeals to his eye, he deliberately looks about for some one who may make him a good, a useful, and, if possible, an ornamental wife. In the first case he is really to be pitied; but his condition only excites amusement. The man is treated as temporarily insane, and every one looks to the consummation of the marriage as the only means to restore him to his right mind. That, indeed, is generally the result, but not for the reason to which the cure is popularly ascribed. The swain is very much in love, whereas the lady of his choice is entering into the contract for a multitude of reasons, where passionate affection, very probably, plays quite an inferior part. The man's ardour destroys any dis-

cretion he may have. He digs a pit for himself and falls into it, and, unless he has great experience, unusual sympathy, or consummate tact, he misunderstands the signs, draws false conclusions, and nurses the seeds of discontent which will sooner or later come up and bear bitter fruit.

If, on the other hand, he deliberately enters the matrimonial market and makes his choice with calm calculation, as he would enter the mart to supply any other need, he may run less risk of disappointment. But the other party to the bargain will, in due time, come to regret the part she has undertaken to play, and feel that what the man wanted was less a wife than a housekeeper, a hostess, a useful ally, or an assistant in the preservation of a family name. Very few women would fail to discover the truth in such a case, and probably none would neglect to mention it. Neither the fact, the discovery, nor the mention of it will help to make a happy home.

With husbands and wives, if neither have any need to work, it ought to be easy to avoid boredom (the most gruesome of all maladies), and to accommodate themselves to each other's wishes. They, however, constitute a very small proportion of society. A man usually has to work all day,

and, if he is strong and healthy, it is hardly reasonable to suppose that his only thought, when his work is over, should be how he can best amuse his wife. If he sets that single object before him as his duty or his pleasure, and his wife accepts the sacrifice, the man's health is almost certain to suffer, unless there is some form of exercise which they can enjoy together.

Husbands and wives take a good deal for granted, and it is more curious that lovers, who are bound by no such tie, often meet with shipwreck on exactly the same sort of dangers. To be too exacting is probably, of all causes, the most fertile in parting devoted lovers.

But enough of speculation. Pardon my homily, and let me answer your question. You ask me what has become of the man we used to see so constantly, sitting in the Park with a married lady who evidently enjoyed his society. I will tell you, and you will then understand why it is that you have not seen him since that summer when we too found great satisfaction in each other's company. He was generally "about the town," and when not there seemed rather to haunt the river. Small blame to him for that; there is none with perceptions so dead that the river, on a hot July

day, will not appeal to them. I cannot tell how long afterwards it was, but the man became engaged to a girl who was schooling or travelling in France. She was the sister of the woman we used to see in the Park. *Un bel giorno* the man and his future sister-in-law started for the Continent, to see his *fiancée*. Arrived at Dover, the weather looked threatening, or the lady wanted rest, or it was part of the arrangement—details of this kind are immaterial—anyhow, they decided to stay the night in an hotel and cross the following morning. In the grey light which steals through darkness and recoils from day, some wanderer or stolid constable saw a white bundle lying on the pavement by the wall of the hotel. A closer examination showed this to be the huddled and shattered body of a man in his night-dress; a very ghastly sight, for he was dead. It was the man we used to see in the Park, and several storeys above the spot where he was found were the windows, not of his room, but of another. I do not know whether the lady continued her journey; but, if she did, her interview with her sister must have been a bad experience.

XIV

BY THE SEA

YOU asked me to paint you a picture — a picture of a wonderful strand half-circling a space of sunlit sea; an island-studded bay, girt, landwards, by a chain of low blue hills, whose vesture of rich foliage is, through all the years, mirrored in the dazzling waters that bathe those rocky feet. The bay is enclosed between two headlands, both lofty, both rising sheer out of the sea, but that on the north juts out only a little, while the southern promontory is much bolder, and terminates a long strip of land running at right angles to the shore out into very deep water.

The beach between these headlands forms an arc of a circle, and the cord joining its extremities would be about seven miles in length, while following the shore the distance is nearly ten miles.

One might search east or west, the Old World

or the New, and find in them few places so attractive as this little-known and sparsely inhabited dent in a far Eastern coast.

Here the sky is nearly always bright; a day which, in its thirteen hours of light, does not give at least half of brilliant, perhaps too brilliant sunshine, is almost unknown. Then it is the sunshine of endless summer, not for a month or a season, but for ever.

Except on rare occasions, the winds from the sea are softest zephyrs, the land breezes are cool and fragrant, sufficient only to stir the leaves of trees and gently ruffle the placid surface of the bay.

The waters of the bay are green—green like a yellow emerald—but in some few places, near the shore, this changes into a warm brown. The beach is a wide stretch of sand broken by rocks of dark umber or Indian red. The sand is, in some places, so startlingly white that the eye can hardly bear the glare of it, while in others it is mixed with fine-broken grains of the ironstone called laterite, and this gives a burnt-sienna colour to the beach. When the tide is high, the great stretches of hard, clean sand are covered with water to a depth of between five and ten feet,

and, owing to the absence of mud, mangroves, and mankind, the waters of the bay are of an extraordinary limpidity. The beach in many places dips steeply, so that, at high tide, there are six feet of water within two or three yards of the trees, shrubs, ferns, and creepers that clothe the shore in an abandonment of wild and graceful luxuriance. The sand shines beneath the waters of the sea like powdered diamonds, and all the myriads of pebbles and shells glisten and scintillate, with a fire and life and colour which they lose when the tide falls and leaves the sands dry, but for the little pools that fill the depressions of a generally even surface.

Then, however, is the time to see strange shells moving slowly about, and crabs, of marvellous colour and unexpected instincts, scampering in hundreds over the purple rocks, that here and there make such a striking contrast to the brilliant orange and red, or the startling whiteness of the sand in which they lie half-embedded.

And how positively delightful it is to paddle with bare feet between and over these rounded stones, while the tireless waters make continents and oceans in miniature, and the strange denizens of this life-charged summer sea destroy each other,

in the ceaseless struggle to preserve an existence for which they are no more responsible than we are. Here is an army of scarlet-backed crabs, hunting in battalions for something smaller and weaker than its own tiny, fragile units. The spider-like legion, alarmed by the approach of your naked feet, scuttles hurriedly towards a new Red Sea, and, dashing recklessly into the two inches of water, which are running between banks of sandy desert, disappears as completely as Pharaoh and his host. Unlike the Egyptian king, however, the crabs, which have only burrowed into the sand, will presently reappear on the other shore and scour the desert for a morning meal.

And then you are standing amongst the rocks, on a point of a bay within the bay; and, as the rippling wavelets wash over your feet, you peer down into the deeper eddies and pools in search of a sea-anemone. Again, you exclaim in childish admiration of the marvellous colouring of a jelly-fish and his puzzling fashion of locomotion, or your grown-up experience allows you an almost pleasurable little shudder when you think of the poisonous possibilities of this tenderly-tinted, gauzily-gowned digestive system.

The land is not less rich in life than the sea. Nature has fringed the waters with a garden of graceful trees, flowering shrubs, brilliantly blossomed creepers, and slender ferns, far more beautiful in their untrained luxuriance than any effort of human ingenuity could have made them. There are magnolias, sweeping the waters with their magnificent creamy blossoms, made more conspicuous by their background of great, dark green leaves. There are gorgeous yellow alamanders, each blossom as large as a hand; soft pale pink myrtles, star-flowered jasmines, and the delicate wax-plant with its clusters of red or white blossoms. These and a multitude of others, only known by barbarous botanical names, nestle into each other's arms, interlace their branches, and form arbours of perfumed shade. Close behind stand almond and cashew trees, tree-ferns, cocoanuts, and sago palms, and then the low hills, clothed with the giants of a virgin forest, that shut out any distant view.

Groups of sandpipers paddle in the little wavelets that lovingly caress the shore; birds of the most gorgeous plumage flit through the jungle with strange cries; and, night and morning, flocks of pigeons, plumed in green and yellow, in orange

and brown, flash meteor-like trails of colour, in their rapid flight from mainland to island and back again. The bay is studded with islets, some near, some far, tiny clusters of trees growing out of the water, or a mass of stone, clothed from base to summit with heavy jungle, except for a narrow band of red rocks above the water's edge.

Sailing in and out the islands, rounding the headlands, or standing across the bay, are boats with white or brown or crimson sails; boats of strange build, with mat or canvas sails of curious design, floating, like tired birds, upon the restful waters of this "changeless summer sea."

But you remember it all: how we sat under the great blossoms and shining leaves of the magnolias, and, within arm's length, found treasures of opal-tinted pebbles, and infinite variety of tiny shells, coral-pink and green and heliotrope, —and everything seemed very good indeed.

A mass of dark-red boulders, overlying a bed of umber rock, ran out into the water, closing, as with a protecting arm, one end of the little inlet, while the forest-clad hill, rising sheer from the point, shut out everything beyond. And then the road! bright *terra cotta*, winding round the

bluff through masses of foliage in every shade of green,—giant trees, a maze of undergrowth, and the dew-laden ferns and mosses, blazing with emerald fires under the vagrant shafts of sunlight; —*dies cretâ notanda.*

Do you remember how, when the sun had gone, and the soft, fragrant, Eastern night brought an almost tangible darkness, lighted only by the stars, we returned across the bay in a little boat, with two quaintly coloured paper lanterns making a bright spot of colour high above the bow? The only sound to break the measured cadence of the oars was the gentle whisper of the land-wind through the distant palm leaves, and the sighing of the tide as it wooed the passive beach.

And then, as we glided slowly through the starlit darkness, you, by that strange gift of sympathetic intuition, answered my unspoken thought, and sang the *Allerseelen*, sang it under your breath, "soft and low," as though it might not reach any ears but ours—yes, that was All Souls' Day.

There was only the sea and the sky and the stars, only the perfection of aloneness, "*Le rêve de rester ensemble sans dessein.*"

And then, all too soon, we came to a space of lesser darkness, visible through the belt of trees which lined the shore; far down that water-lane twinkled a light, the beacon of our landing-place. Do you remember?——

XV

AN ILLUMINATION

AFTER an absence which cannot be measured by days—not at least days of twenty-four hours, but rather by spaces of longing and regret, —I am back again in a house where everything suggests your presence so vividly that I hardly yet realise that I cannot find you, and already, several times, hearing, or fancying I heard, some sound, I have looked up expecting to see you. It is rather pitiful that, waking or sleeping, our senses should let us be so cruelly fooled.

It seems years ago, but, sitting in this room to-night, memory carries me back to another evening when you were also here. It had rained heavily, and the sun had almost set when we started to ride down the hill, across the river, and out into the fast-darkening road that strikes through the grass-covered plain, and leads to the distant hills. The strangely fascinating transformation of day

into night, as commonly seen from that road, cannot fail to arrest the attention and awaken the admiration of the most casual observer; but for us, I think, it possessed the special charm which comes from the contemplation of nature in harmony with the mood of the spectator,—or seen, as with one sight, by two persons in absolute sympathy of body and soul. Then nothing is lost—no incident, no change of colour, no momentary effect of light or shade; the scene is absorbed through the eyes, and when the sensation caused finds expression through the voice of one, the heart of the other responds without the need of words.

I see the picture now; a string of waggons, the patient oxen standing waiting for their drivers, picturesquely grouped before a wayside booth; a quaintly fashioned temple, with its faint altar-light shining like a star from out the deep gloom within the portal; tall, feathery palms, whose stems cast long, sharp shadows across the dark-red road; on either side a grass-covered, undulating plain, disappearing into narrow valleys between the deep blue bills; behind all, the grey, mist-enshrouded mountains, half hidden in the deepening twilight.

The last gleams of colour were dying out of the

sky as we left the main road, and, turning sharp to the left, urged our horses through the gathering darkness. At last we were obliged to pull up, uncertain of our bearings, and even doubtful, in the now absolute blackness of tropical night, whether we were in the right way. Carefully avoiding the deep ditches, more by the instinct of the horses than any guidance of ours, we struck into another road and set our faces homewards. It was still intensely dark, but growing clearer as the stars shone out, and we gradually became more accustomed to the gloom; dark yet delightful, and we agreed that this was the time of all others to really enjoy the East, with a good horse under you and a sympathetic companion to share the fascination of the hour.

Riding through the groves of trees that lined both sides of the road, we caught occasional glimpses of illuminated buildings, crowning the steep hill which forms one side of the valley. Traversing the outskirts of the town, we crossed a river and came out on a narrow plain, above which rose the hill. I shall never forget the vision which then rose before us. How we exclaimed with delight! and yet there was such an air of glamour about the scene, such unrealness,

such a savour of magic and enchantment as tied our tongues for a while.

The heights rose in a succession of terraces till they seemed to almost pierce the clouds, each terrace a maze of brilliantly illuminated buildings to which the commanding position, the environment, the style of architecture, and the soft, hazy atmosphere lent an imposing grandeur.

The buildings which crowned the summit of the spur, lined the terraces, and seemed to be connected by a long flight of picturesque stone steps, were all of a dazzling whiteness. Low-reaching eaves, supported on white pillars, formed wide verandahs, whose outer edges were bordered by heavy balustrades. Every principal feature of every building, each door and window, each verandah, balustrade, and step, was outlined by innumerable yellow lights that shone like great stars against the soft dark background of sky and hill. It is impossible to imagine the beauty of the general effect: this succession of snow-white walls, rising from foot to summit of a mist-enveloped hill, suggested the palace-crowned heights of Futtepur Síkri, illuminated for some brilliant festival. The effect of splendour and enchantment was intensified by the graceful but

indistinct outlines of a vast building, standing in unrelieved darkness by the bank of the river we had just crossed. In the gloom it was only possible to note the immense size of this nearer palace, and to realise its towers and domes, its pillars and arches, and the consistently Moorish style of its architecture.

As we approached the lowest of the series of illuminated buildings that, step by step, rose to the summit of the heights, we beheld a sheet of water beneath us on our right, and in this water were reflected the innumerable lights of a long, low temple, standing fifty feet above the opposite bank of the lake. Fronds of the feathery bamboo rose from the bank, and, bending forwards in graceful curves, cast deep shadows over the waters of this little lake, from the depths of which blazed the fires of countless lights.

We stood there and drank in the scene, graving it on the tablets of our memories as something never to be forgotten. Then slowly our horses passed into the darkness of the road, which, winding round the hillside, led up into the open country, a place of grass-land and wood, lying grey and silent under a starlit sky.

And, when we had gained the house, it was

here you sat, in this old-world seat, with its covering of faded brocade. I can see you now, in the semi-darkness of a room where the only lamp centres its softened light on you—an incomparable picture in a charming setting. You do not speak; you are holding in your hand a small white card, and you slowly tear it in two, and then again and again. There is something in your face, some strange glory that is not of any outward light, nor yet inspired by that enchanted vision so lately seen. It is a transfiguration, a light from within, like the blush that dyes the clouds above a waveless sea, at the dawn of an Eastern morning. Still you speak no word, but the tiny fragments of that card are now so small that you can no longer divide them, and some drop from your hands upon the floor.

I picked them up—afterwards—did I not?

XVI

OF DEATH, IN FICTION

IT is delightful to have some one to talk to with whom it is not necessary to think always before one speaks, to choose every word, to explain every thought—some one, in fact, who has sympathy enough not to be bored with the discussion of a subject that deals neither with gossip nor garments, and intelligence enough to understand what is implied as well as what is said. I have done a good deal of desultory reading lately, mostly modern English and French fiction, and I cannot help being struck by the awkward manner in which authors bring their stories to a conclusion. It so very often happens that a book begins well, possibly improves as the plot develops, becomes even powerful as it nears the climax, and then—then the poor puppets, having played their several parts and done all that was required of them, must be got rid of, in order to round off

the tale, to give finality, and satisfy the ordinary reader's craving for "full particulars." This varnishing and framing and hanging of the picture is usually arrived at by marrying or slaying some principal character; the first is a life, and the last a death, sentence. Thus the reader is satisfied, and often the story is ruined; that is, if skilful drafting and true perspective are as necessary to a good picture as artistic colouring and the correct disposition of light and shade. But is the reader satisfied? Usually, yes; occasionally, no. In the latter case the book is closed with a strong sense of disappointment, and a conviction that the writer has realised the necessity of bringing down the curtain on a scene that finishes the play, and leaves nothing to the imagination; so, to secure that end, he has abandoned truth, and even probability, and has clumsily introduced the priest or the hangman, the "cup of cold poison," or the ever-ready revolver. The effect of the charming scenery, the pretty frocks, the artistic furniture, and "the crisp and sparkling dialogue," is thus spoilt by the unreal and unconvincing *dénouement.*

It seems to me—"to my stupid comprehension," as the polite Eastern constantly insists—that this failure is due to two causes. First, most fiction is

founded on fact, and the writer has, in history, in the newspapers, in his own experience or that of his friends, met with some record or paragraph, some adventure or incident, that has served for the foundation of his story; but, unless purely historical, he has been obliged to supply the last scene himself, because in reality there was none, or, if there was, he could not use it. In our own experience, in that of every one who has seen a little of the world, have we not become acquainted with quite a number of dramatic, or even tragic incidents, that have scarred our own or others' lives, and would make stories of deep interest in the hands ot a skilful writer? But the action does not cease. The altar is oftener the fateful beginning than the happy ending of the drama; and, when the complications fall thick upon each other, there is no such easy way out of the *impasse* as that provided by a little prussic acid or a bullet. They are ready to hand, I grant you, but they are not so often used in life as in fiction. I have known a man walk about, with a revolver in his pocket, for three days, looking for a suitable opportunity to use it upon himself, and then he has put it away against the coming of a burglar. When it is not yourself, but some one else, you desire to

get rid of, the prospect is, strange to say, even less inviting. Thus it happens that, in real life, we suffer and we endure, the drama is played and the tragedy is in our hearts, but it does not take outward and visible form. So the fiction—whilst it is true to life—holds our interest, and the skill of the artist excites our admiration; but the impossible climax appeals to us, no more than a five-legged cow. It is a *lusus naturæ*, that is all. They happen, these monstrosities, but they never live long, and it were best to stifle them at birth.

Pardon! you say there is genius. Yes, but it is rare, and I have not the courage to even discuss genius; it is like Delhi and the planets, a long way off. We can only see it with the help of a powerful glass, if indeed then it is visible. There is only one writer who openly lays claim to it, and the claim seems to be based chiefly on her lofty disdain for adverse criticism. That is, perhaps, a sign, but not a complete proof, of the existence of the divine fire.

But to return to the humbler minds. It does happen that real lives are suddenly and violently ended by accident, murder, or suicide, and there seems no special reason why fictitious lives should be superior to such chances. Indeed, to some

authors, there would be no more pleasure in writing novels, without the tragic element as the main feature, than there is for some great billiard exponents to play the game with the spot-stroke barred. I would only plead, in this case, that the accident or the suicide, to be life-like, need not be very far-fetched. In murder, as one knows, the utmost licence is not only permissible but laudable, for the wildest freaks of imagination will hardly exceed the refinements, the devilish invention, and the cold-blooded execution of actual crimes. I remember you once spoke scornfully of using a common form of accident as a means of getting rid of a character in fiction; but surely that is not altogether inartistic, for the accidents that occur most commonly are those to which the people of romance will naturally be as liable as you or I. It is difficult to imagine that you should be destroyed by an explosion in a coal-mine, or that I should disappear in a balloon; but we might either of us be drowned, or killed in a railway accident, under any one of a variety of probable circumstances. Again, in suicide, the simplest method is, for purposes of fiction, in all likelihood the best. Men usually shoot themselves, and women, especially when they cannot

swim, seek the water. Those who prefer poison are probably the swimmers. It is a common practice in fiction to make the noble-minded man who loves the lady, but finds himself in the way of what he believes to be her happiness (that is, of course, some other man), determine to destroy himself; and he does it with admirable resolution, considering how cordially he dislikes the rôle for which he has been cast, and how greatly he yearns for the affection which no effort of his can possibly secure. I cannot, however, remember any hero of fiction who has completed the sacrifice of his life in a thoroughly satisfactory manner, for he invariably leaves his body lying about, where it is sure to attract attention, and cause great distress to the lady he designs to oblige. That is thoughtless; and those who really mean to prove their self-denial should arrange, not only to extinguish their lives, but to get rid of their bodies, so that there may be as little scandal and trouble to their friends as possible. I have always felt the sincerest admiration for the man who, having made up his mind to destroy himself, and purchased a revolver with which to do the deed, settled his affairs, moved into lodgings quite close to a cemetery, wrote letters to the coroner, the

doctor, and the undertaker, giving them in each case the exact hour at which they should call on their several errands, paid all his debts, left something to indemnify his landlady, and more than enough for funeral expenses, and then shot himself. That, however, was not a character in fiction, but a common mortal, and there was no lady in the case.

I am sure there are many people who would be greatly obliged to me for inviting attention to these matters, if only they could get it in print, to lie about on the table with the page turned down at the proper place. Nothing is more common than the determined suicides who live to a green old age for want of a book of instructions. These people weary their friends and acquaintances by eternally reiterated threats that they will destroy themselves, and yet, however desirable that course may be, they never take it. This novel and brilliant idea first comes to them in some fit of pique, and they declare that they will make an end of themselves, "and then perhaps you will be sorry." They are so pleased with the effect caused by this statement, that, on the next favourable opportunity, they repeat it; and then they go on and on, dragging in their

wretched threat on every possible and impossible occasion, especially in the presence of strangers and the aged relatives of themselves or the person they want to get at, until mere acquaintances wish they would fulfil their self-imposed task and cease from troubling. It is almost amusing to hear how these *suicides déterminés* vary, from day to day or week to week, the methods which they have selected for their own destruction—poison, pistols, drowning, throwing themselves out of window or under a train—nothing comes amiss; but, when they wish to be really effective, and carry terror into the hearts of their hearers, they usually declare either, that they will blow their brains out, or cut their throats. The vision of either of these processes of self-extinction, even though remote and unsubstantial, is well calculated to curdle the blood. That, as a rule, is all that is meant; and, when you understand it, the amusement is harmless if it is not exactly kind. "Vain repetitions" are distinctly wearying, even when they come from husbands and wives, parents or children; the impassioned lover, too, is not altogether free from the threat of suicide and the repetition of it. In all these cases it would be a kindness to those who appear weary of life,

and who weary others by threatening to put an end to it, if they could be persuaded, either to follow the example of the man who, without disclosing his intentions, took a room by the gate of the cemetery, or, if they don't really mean it, to say nothing more about it. Therefore, if ever you are over-tried in this way, leave this letter where it will be read. The weak point about the prescription is that it is more likely to cure than to kill. However, I must leave that to you, for a good deal depends on how the remedy is applied. The size of the dose, the form of application, whether external or internal, will make all the difference in the world. I do not prescribe for a patient, but for a disease; the rest may safely be left to your admirable discretion; but you will not forget that a dose which can safely and advisedly be administered to an adult may kill a child.

XVII

A HAND AT ÉCARTÉ

I WROTE to you of death in fiction, and, if I now write of death in fact, it is partly to see how far you agree with an opinion that was lately expressed to me by a man who is himself literary, and whose business it is to know the public taste in works of fiction. We were discussing a book of short stories, and he spoke of the author's success, and said he hoped we might have a further instalment of similar tales. I ventured to suggest that the public must be rather nauseated with horrors, with stories of blood and crime, even though they carried their readers into new surroundings, and introduced them to interesting and little-described societies. My companion said, "No, there need be no such fear; we like gore. A craving for horrors pervades all classes, and is not easily satisfied. Those who cannot gloat over the contemplation of carcasses and blood, revel in the sanguinary details which make

them almost spectators in the real or imaginary tragedies of life. The newspapers give one, and some writers of fiction the other; there is a large demand for both, especially now that the circle of readers is so rapidly widening amongst a class that cannot appreciate refinements of style, and neither understands nor desires the discussion of abstract questions. Therefore give us,—not Light, but—Blood."

I wonder what you think. If I felt you had a craving for horrors I could paint the pages scarlet; for I have been in places where human life was held so cheap that death by violence attracted little notice, where tragedies were of daily occurrence, and hundreds of crimes, conceived with fiendish ingenuity and carried out with every detail calculated to thrill the nerves and tickle the jaded palate of the most determined consumer of "atrocities," lie hidden in the records of Courts of Justice and Police Offices. Any one who compares the feelings with which he throws aside the daily paper, as he leaves the Underground Railway, or even those with which he closes the shilling shocker in more favourable surroundings, with the sense of exaltation, of keen, pulse-quickening joy that comes to him after reading one page in the book of Nature

—after a long look at one of its myriad pictures—would, I think, hesitate to confess to a great hankering for a perpetual diet of blood. It is not the dread of appearing to be dissipated, but the certainty that there is better health, and a far more intense pleasure, in the clear atmosphere of woods and hills, of river and sea, than in the shambles.

Sewers are a product of civilisation in cities, but they are not pretty to look at, and I cannot appreciate a desire to explore their darksome nastiness while we may, if we choose, remain in the light and air of heaven. London slums are daily and nightly the scenes of nameless horrors, but it may be doubted whether a faithful and minute description of them, in the form of cheap literature, does more good than harm.

That is by way of preface. What I am going to tell you struck me, because I question whether a tragedy in real life was ever acted with details that sound so fictional, so imaginary, and yet there was no straining after effect. It was the way the thing had to be worked out; and like the puzzles you buy, and waste hours attempting to solve, I suppose the pieces would only fit when arranged in the places for which they were designed by their Maker.

A HAND AT ÉCARTÉ

A long time ago there lived, in one of the principal cities of Italy, a certain marchese, married to a woman of great beauty and distinguished family. She had a lover, a captain of cavalry, who had made himself an Italian reputation for his success in love-affairs, and also in the duels which had been forced upon him by those who believed themselves to have been wronged. The soldier was a very accomplished swordsman and equally skilful with a pistol, and that is possibly the reason why the husband of the marchesa was blind to a state of affairs which at last became the scandal of local society. The marchesa had a brother, a leading member of the legal profession; and when he had unsuccessfully indicated to his brother-in-law the line of his manifest duty, he determined to himself defend his sister's name, for the honour of an ancient and noble family. The brother was neither a swordsman nor a pistol-shot, and when he undertook to vindicate his sister's reputation he realised exactly what it might cost him. The position was unbearable; the *cafés* were ringing with the tale; and, if her husband shirked the encounter, some man of her own family must bring the offender to book and satisfy the demands of public opinion.

Having made up his mind as to the *modus*

operandi, the brother sought his foe in a crowded *café*, and in the most public manner insulted him by striking him across the face with his glove. A challenge naturally followed, and the choice of weapons was left with the assailant. He demanded pistols, and, knowing his own absolute inferiority, stipulated for special conditions, which were, that the combatants should stand at a distance of one pace only, that they should toss, or play a game of *écarté* for the first shot, and that if the loser survived it, he should go as close to his adversary as he pleased before discharging his own weapon. Under the circumstances, the soldier thought he could hardly decline any conditions which gave neither party an advantage, but no one could be found to undertake the duties of second in a duel on such terms. Two friends of the principals agreed, however, to stand by with rifles, to see that the compact was not violated; and it was understood that they would at once fire on the man who should attempt foul play.

It was, of course, imperative that the proceedings should be conducted with secrecy, and the meeting was arranged to take place on the outskirts of a distant town, to which it was necessary to make a long night journey by rail. In the

early dawn of a cold morning in March, the four men met in the cemetery of a famous monastery, that stands perched on a crag, overlooking the neighbouring city, and a wide vale stretching away for miles towards the distant hills. A pack of cards was produced, and, with a tombstone as a table, the adversaries played one hand at *écarté*. The game went evenly enough, and rather slowly, till the brother marked four against his opponent's three. It was then the latter's deal; he turned up the king and made the point, winning the game. A line was drawn, the distance measured, the pistols placed in the duellists' hands, and the two friends retired a few yards, holding their loaded rifles ready for use. The word was given, and the brother stood calmly awaiting his fate. The soldier slowly raised his pistol to a point in line with the other's head, and, from a distance of a few inches, put a bullet through his brain, the unfortunate man falling dead without uttering a sound or making a movement.

The officer obtained a month's leave and fled across the border into Switzerland, but, before the month was up, public excitement over the affair had waned, and the gossips were busy with a new scandal. Their outraged sense of propriety had

been appeased by the sacrifice of the dead, and the novel and piquant circumstances which accompanied it. As for the intrigue which had led to the duel, that, of course, went on the same as ever, only rather more so.

XVIII

THE GENTLE ART OF VEERING WITH THE WIND

TO-DAY I received a letter from you. I have read it twice, and, though it contains eight pages of closely written lines, there is not one word in it that would show that I am any more to you than the merest acquaintance. For weeks I have anxiously awaited this letter; plans, of the utmost importance to me, depended upon the answer you would give to a question I had put; and my whole future, at least that future which deals with a man's ambitions, would, in all probability, be influenced by your reply. I asked you —well, never mind what—and you, being entirely free to write what you mean and what you wish, say that it is a point on which you cannot offer advice; but you tell me that you have given up reading and taken to gardening, as you find it is

better for you! Have you ever read the story of Zadig? If you have, you will perhaps remember how his wife, Azora, railed against the newly made widow whom she found gardening. I have no prejudices of that kind, and, in my case, no one's nose is in danger of the razor; but still I think I may not unreasonably feel somewhat aggrieved.

Do not believe that I could ever wish to remind you of what you have forgotten, or wish to forget. I only want to know what is real and what is counterfeit, and you alone can tell me. I may ask this, may I not? It is not that I may presume to judge you, or from any wish to gratify an impertinent curiosity, but that I may be saved from imagining what is not, and, while torturing myself, possibly even distress you. I find it hard to reconcile this letter of yours with others I have received, and if that sounds to you but a confession of my stupidity, I would rather admit my want of intelligence and crave your indulgence, than stand convicted of putting two and two together and making of them twenty-two. If you tell me there is no question of indulgence, but that quite regular verbs have different moods, that present and past tenses are irreconcilable, and, of the future, no man knoweth—I shall have my answer.

You do not write under the influence of winter. I cannot charge myself with any offence against you. Nay, God knows that all my thoughts and all my efforts are but to do you honour. If I have misread your earlier letters, if I have been unduly elated by such kind words as you have sent me, it is the simplest thing in the world to undeceive me and show me the error of my ways. Are you only *souffrante*, and may I disregard the chilling atmosphere of your present missive, remembering the tender sympathy of voice, of eye, of hand, in the rapturous days of a cherished past?

It seems as natural to some people to love to-day, and to be almost strangers to-morrow, as that we should revel in a flood of light when the moon is full, and grope in darkness when the goddess of night is no longer visible. The temperament that makes this possible is fortunately rare, so much so that it creates an interest in the observer. I have never seen it in man, but I have in woman; and one realises that then it is better to be a spectator than an actor in what is never a farce, and may easily develop into tragedy. Imagine such a woman of very unusual personal attractions: great beauty of face

and figure united to a high intelligence and extreme charm of manner; witty, ambitious, courageous, full of high thoughts and endowed with all the advantages that wealth can add to personal gifts. Deep in a nature that is strangely complex, and capable of the most opposite extremes, suppose there is implanted, amongst many other feelings, a passionate yearning to be understood, and to be loved with a love that would shrink from nothing to prove the greatness of its devotion. Here you have a being capable of what seem the strangest contradictions, and not the least startling of these may be a rare, but absolute and passionate, self-abandonment, under the influence of certain circumstances which strongly appeal to the senses. Overcome by intoxication of sound, colour, and magnetism, every moral and conventional muscle suddenly relaxes, and, the violence of the forces released, is wild and uncontrolled, because of the firm determination by which they are habitually bound. To-morrow, in the cold grey light of day, the slow-working mind of man is absolutely bewildered by what he sees and hears. He comes, dominated by an exalted passion, enthralled by a vision of ecstasy through which he sees, imperfectly, the people about him,

only "men as trees walking"; reserving his thoughts and perceptions of surrounding objects till he shall again gaze upon that face which seems to him to have opened the door of life with the key of a boundless love. Still dazed by the memories of last night, he enters the presence of his beloved, and experiences a shock, such as a swimmer might feel, if floating, half-entranced, in some tropic sea, he suddenly hit against an iceberg.

Sometimes, even, influenced by surroundings, maddened by the whisperings of a southern night, passed in a place where she breathes an atmosphere impregnated with the romance of centuries, the lonely soul of the woman, hungering for sympathy and communion, will seize a pen and write, "Come to me; I want you, for you understand; come, and I will give you happiness." Before the letter has been gone one day, on a journey that may take it to the ends of the earth, the writer's mood has changed, and she has forgotten her summons as completely as though it had never been written. When the missive reaches its destination, the recipient will be wise to curb his impetuosity, and realise that his opportunity is long since dead and buried.

The bewildering phases of such a nature as I have here imagined are nothing to us. To you it may even seem inexcusable that I should allude to a character with which you have no sympathy, an abnormal growth which sounds rather fantastic than real. It is the *argumentum ad absurdum*, and has its value. This strange perversity which, by reason of its startling contradictions, seems almost inhuman, and if, in rare instances, met with, can only excite feelings of curiosity or repugnance—this is the extreme case. The application of the moral will come nearer home to us, if we make the changes from passionate love to cold indifference a little less marked, the intervals between the moods a little longer. It is well to know one's own mind, not because wavering and change hurt the fickle, but because some stupid person may suffer by the purchase of experience; may take it to heart, and may do himself an injury. It is well to know one's own heart, and what it can give; lest another put too high a value on the prize and lose all in trying to win it. It is well to know our own weakness, and at once recognise that we shall be guided by it; lest another think it is strength, and make, for our sakes, sacrifices that only frighten and perhaps

even annoy us, especially when they are made in the absurd belief that they will please us.

If you can give the extreme of happiness, do not forget that you can also cause an infinity of pain. No one can blame you for declining to accord favours; and if that refusal gives pain, there is no help for it. There can be little sympathy for those who seek the battle and then complain of their wounds. Such hurts do not rankle, and quickly heal. But it is different when a woman gives love of her own free will, uninfluenced by any consideration beyond her inclination, and then takes it back, also without other cause than caprice. It is difficult to use any other word—either it was a caprice to say she gave what never was given, or it is a caprice to take it back. A confession of thoughtlessness in estimating the character of her own feelings, or of weakness and inability to resist any opposing influence, is a poor pretext for a sudden withering of the tendrils of affection. Such a confession is an indifferent consolation to the heart which realises its loss, but cannot appreciate the situation. Do not mistake me; it is so hard to be absolutely candid and fair in considering our own cases. We are not less likely to make

mistakes in matters of sentiment than in the purely practical affairs of life. If we think we love, and then become certain that we have made a mistake, the only safe and kind course is to confess the error; but if we deliberately seek love and give it, much protesting and much exacting, how shall we then deny it? Would one say, "If you asked me, I would go down into hell with you, now," and then, ere twelve months had passed, for no crime but enforced absence, speak or write, to that other, almost as a stranger?

There was Peter, I know; but even he was not altogether satisfied with himself, and, besides denying his Lord, he stands convicted of physical cowardice.

XIX

A REJOINDER

THANK you. Before my last letter could reach you, *vous m'aviez donné affreusement à penser*, and this is what occurs to me :—

> "Of all the lover's sorrows, next to that
> Of Love by Love forbidden, is the voice
> Of Friendship turning harsh in Love's reproof,
> And overmuch of counsel—whereby Love
> Grows stubborn, and recoiling unsupprest
> Within, devours the heart within the breast."

I dare say it is as well. I am beginning to recognise the real attractions of what I may call a "surprise letter." I have had several lately. It is perhaps the irony of fate that, just after I had mildly hinted to you that the phases of the moods of the feminine mind were sometimes rather bewildering, you should write to me the sort of letter which, had it been sent by me to a man I called my friend, I should richly deserve death at his hands. There are

certainly few things more thoroughly enjoyable than to take up a letter that you see comes from —well, let us say from a very dear friend—to dally a little over the opening, in the mingled desire and hesitation to read the contents; feverish desire to know that all is well, to hear some word of affectionate regard—hesitation lest the news be bad, the letter cold; and then to find such a missive as you have sent to me.

To begin with, there is a page and a half on which you have poured out the vials of your wrath. I was quite hot before I had read half of it, and my ears even were burning before I came to a page in which you told me how greatly you were enjoying yourself. And then, at the end, there was another page and a half, every word of which seemed to strike me in the face like a blow. I suppose you introduced the middle section that I might meditate on the difference between your circumstances and mine, and duly appreciate the full weight of your displeasure. Well, yes, I have done so; and, as God only knows when I shall see you again, I must write one or two of the many words it is in my heart to say to you.

I am a very unworthy person; I have deeply

offended you; and you have felt it necessary to tell me gently how ill my conduct looks to you. You leave me to infer that there are offences which cannot be tolerated, and that it would not be difficult to dispense with my acquaintance. I humbly accept this verdict, and as it is absolutely just and right that the prisoner should first be condemned without hearing, and then suffered to state his case, and say anything he pleases in mitigation of sentence, I will try not to weary you by any reference to ancient history, but simply confine myself to the charge.

Now, what is my crime? You asked me a question; I am sure you have long ago forgotten what it was, and I need not remind you; but I, like an idiot, thought you really wanted an answer, and that it was my bounden duty to find a means of sending it. The question gave me infinite pleasure, and, again like an idiot, I thought the answer I longed to send would be welcome. I could not send it in the ordinary way, as you will admit, and, a sudden thought striking me that there was a safe and easy means of transmission, I acted on it, and your letter is the result. You tell me your pride is wounded, your trust in my word gone, and your conscience scandalised. It is useless for

me now to express regret. I have been convicted, and I am only pleading in mitigation of sentence. Well, mine was a deliberate sin. I had to decide whether I would answer you or not, and, though I disliked the means, I thought the end would justify them. To me they did not then, and do not now, seem very objectionable; and it certainly did not occur to me that I could thereby wound the most sensitive feelings. Of course I was an imbecile, and ought to have realised that a question like that was only a phrase, with no serious meaning. I gave a promise, you say, and have broken it. It is a pity. I had rather have sinned in any other way, for I have my pride too, and it asserts itself chiefly in the keeping of promises, rather than the gift of them. As to the conscience, I deeply sympathise. An offended conscience must be a very inconvenient, not to say unpleasant, companion. But you were greatly enjoying yourself (you impress that upon me, so you will not be offended if I mention it), therefore I conclude your conscience was satisfied by the uncompromising expression of your sense of my misdeeds. Might I ask which way your conscience was looking when you wrote this letter to me, or does it feel no call to speak on my behalf? I would rather my hand were palsied

than write such a letter to any one, and you know that I have forfeited your favour in trying to do your will. I think your quarrel was rather with your conscience than with me; but it is well to keep friends with those of one's own household.

Truly it is an evil thing to stake one's happiness upon the value of x in an indeterminate equation. It is possible to regard the unknown quanity with philosophy; it is like the unattainable. The mischief all comes with what looks like solution, but proves in the end to be drawn from false premises. Lines can be straight, and figures may be square, but sentient beings are less reliable, and therefore more interesting—as studies. The pity is that we sometimes get too close, in our desire to examine minutely what looks most beautiful and most attractive. Then proximity destroys the powers of critical judgment, and, from appearances, we draw conclusions which are utterly unreliable, because our own intelligence is obscured by the interference of our senses. We have to count with quantities that not only have no original fixed value, but vary from day to day, and even from hour to hour.

You will say that if I can liken you to an algebraic sign, speak of you as a "quantity" and "an inde-

terminate equation," it cannot matter much whether you write to me in terms of hate or love. If, however, you consider where you are and where I am, and if, when this lies in your hand, you are on good terms with your pride and your conscience, you may be able to spare, from the abundance you lavish on them, a grain of sympathy for me in my loneliness. Is it a crime for the humble worshipper to seek to assure the deity of his unaltered devotion? It used not to be so; and though the temple has infinite attractions for me, the tavern none, I could say with the Persian—

> "And this I know: whether the one True Light
> Kindle to love, or Wrath-consume me quite,
> One Flash of It within the Tavern caught
> Better than in the Temple lost outright."

Life is too short, and too full of storm and stress, to induce any one to stake it on a proved uncertainty, however attractive. It is better never to take ship at all than to be constantly meeting disaster on the shoals and rocks of the loveliest summer sea. Of the end of such a venture there is no uncertainty. The bravest craft that ever left port will be reduced to a few rotting timbers, while the sea smiles anew on what is but a picturesque effect.

XX

OF IMPORTUNITY

I MUST unburden myself to you, because I may do so without offence, without shocking you beyond forgiveness; for I feel that if my letter were to another, I should either have to use such self-control that I should gain no relief for my injured feelings, or else the other would think I had gone mad, and blot my name out of the book of her correspondents—two r's, please. You see I am in an evil mood, the bad tense of the evil mood; so I may as well begin in the green leaf what is sure to come in the brown. Besides, you are partly to blame! Is not that like a man? You supplied me with the fruit of this knowledge which has set my teeth on edge, but it is also true that you gave it in furtherance of my request and to oblige me. I fancy that was the case with Eve. Adam probably sent her up a tree (the expression has lasted to our own time), looked

the other way, and pretended he had forgotten all about it when the obliging lady came down and tendered the result of her painful efforts. It is bad enough to climb with your clothes on, as I saw the other day, when I induced a friend to swarm up a fern-tree by telling him I did not believe he could do it. But this is all beside the mark;—what has roused my ire is a parcel of new books, kindly selected by you to cheer my solitude. As they came direct from the bookseller, I do not know whether you have read them, but they are very new indeed, and, from what you say, I think you must at least have wrestled with some of them. Very recent publications, like many of these, are rather a rarity here, and, as I was particularly busy, I lent some of them to friends who are always hungering for new literature. Now I am rather sorry, though I washed my hands of the transaction by saying that I would not take the responsibility of recommending anything, but they were at liberty to take what they liked. In due time the volumes were returned, without comment, but with the pages cut. I did not think anything of that at the time, the realities of the moment interested me a great deal more than any book could; but now I have read some of the

batch, and I am suffering from an earnest desire to meet the authors and "have it out with them." As, however, that is not in my power, I am going to victimise you. There is one story, of a kind that is now common enough, that is specially aggravating. If you have read it you will know which I refer to; if not, I won't tell you. It is written by a woman, and discourses in a very peculiar fashion on the ways of men. That is of no particular moment, for the writer has either a very indifferent knowledge of men, or she is not to be congratulated on her male friends, or she has had some very unfortunate personal experiences, and judges the species by some repulsive individuals. It was a man who said that women do not possess the sentiment of justice, and he might, if he had wished to be fair, have added that it is comparatively rare in men. Men have written many unkind and untrue things about women as a sex, but they cannot have harmed them much, since their influence over the beings, derisively styled "Lords of Creation" is certainly on the increase, especially in new countries like America.

What, however, is rather strange is that, in the book I speak of, there are two women—joint-

heroines, as it were—held up for the reader's admiration, but described as perfectly odious creatures. The story, however, is practically confined to the life and character of one of these ladies, and the exact position of the other, in relation to her friend, is not altogether clear, nor of any concern as regards my point. Let me then speak of the one woman as the heroine; it is to her I wish to apply the epithet odious. The writer, I take it, is very pleased and satisfied with the lady of her creation, and, whilst she never loses an opportunity of enlarging on the very objectionable characteristics of all men of birth and education, she evidently means the reader to understand that she has drawn and coloured the picture of a very perfect and altogether captivating woman. A young, beautiful, intelligent, highly educated, perfectly dressed woman, surrounded by every luxury that great wealth and good taste can secure, may easily be captivating, and it might be counted something less than a crime that a number of admirers should be anxious to marry her. When it comes to character it is different; and even though the spectacle of a woman with fewer attractions than I have named, and a disposition that left something to be desired, enslaving men of renown, is

not unknown to history, it seems a little unusual to design a heroine as the very embodiment of selfishness, and then exhibit her as the perfect woman. The life that is shown to us is chiefly that of a girl,—old enough, and independent and intelligent enough, to know perfectly what she was doing,—constantly allowing, or alluring, men to make love to her; and then, when they wished to marry her, telling them in language which, if not considerate, was certainly plain, how deeply insulted she felt. If they wasted years and years, or lost their useless, sinful lives altogether, over her, that was a matter of such absolute indifference that it never gave her a second thought or a moment of regret. She did not avoid men altogether; on the contrary, she seemed rather fond of their society, as she had only one woman friend, and is described as giving them all ample opportunities of declaring their passionate admiration for her beauty and intelligence. The lovers were many and varied; coming from the peerage, the squirearchy, the army, the Church, and other sources; but they all met with the same fate, and each in turn received a special lecture on the vice and amazing effrontery of his proposal.

I suppose it is a book with a purpose, and,

unlike a Scotch sermon, it is divided into only two heads. As to one, I could imagine the reply might be in the form of another book styled "Her Lord the Eunuch." Biblical history deals with the species. It is less common now, but if a demand again arises, no doubt there will be a supply to meet it. That is the head I cannot discuss, even in these days of *fin de siècle* literature, wherein it is a favourite subject, and would have fewer difficulties than the case of a nineteenth-century Virgin Mary, which formed the text of one volume in the parcel. The other consideration seems to rest on safe ground, with no treacherous bogs or dangerous quicksands, and therefore I venture to ask you what you think of this paragon of all the virtues. Is she the type of a woman's woman? One sometimes, but very, very rarely, meets a woman like this, in England at any rate; and though the lady's girdle is certain to be decorated with a collection of male scalps of all ages and many colours, very few of her own sex will be found in the number of her friends or admirers. Her charity is generally a form of perversity; for if she occasionally lavishes it on some animal or human being, it is a caprice that costs her little, and to the horse or dog which fails in instant

obedience, to the beggar or relative who importunes, she is passionately or coldly cruel. Yet her fascination is real enough, but it seldom endures. There is no need to sympathise with the would-be lovers, who are rejected yet still importunate. When, as sometimes happens in a world of change, there has been mutual love between man and woman, and one has ceased to love, it is natural enough that the other should desire to retain what may still be, to him or her, the only thing worth living for. But to importune a woman to give herself, her body and soul, her whole destiny till death, when she does not wish it, is to ask for something that it were better not to precisely define. Persumably if the man thinks he is in love, it is the woman's love he wants. She says she does not love him, and he is a fool, or worse, to take anything less, even when she is willing to sacrifice or sell herself for any conceivable reason. Surely, if the man had any real regard for her, he would think first of her happiness, and refuse to take advantage of her weakness or necessities. Besides, her misery could not be his advantage, and the worn-out sophism of parents or other interested persons, that "she did not know her own mind, and would get to like him," is too hazardous

a chance on which to stake the welfare of two lives. Of course men plague women to marry them after they have been refused. The world is full of people who want what is not for them, and are not too particular as to the means, if they can secure the end. But I wonder what a man would say if some woman he did not care about worried his life out to marry her. Man is easily flattered, the sensation is with him comparatively rare, and he is very susceptible to the agreeable fumes of that incense; but only the very weakest would be lured to the altar, and the after-life of the lady who took him there would not be an altogether happy one. Man and his descendants have had a grudge against the first woman for thousands of years, for an alleged proposal of hers that is said to have interfered with his prospects. It is not chivalrous for a man to press a woman to "let him love her, if she can't love him;" it is not a very nice proposition, if he will take it home and work it out quietly; it is something very like an insult to her, and it is certainly not likely to be anything but a curse to him. That is when she is endowed with those charming qualities common to most women. When, however, as in the case I have referred to, she has a

special aversion to men generally, and him in particular, and prides herself on the possession of characteristics that he could not admire in his own mother, to still insist upon forcing the lady into a union with him is to be vindictively silly. It is hardly necessary to go as far as this to prove his determination and his title to a sort of spurious constancy.

XXI

OF COINCIDENCES

IN spite of the testimony of many worthy and some unworthy people, I have not yet been able to accept spiritual manifestations and the reappearance of the dead as even remotely probable. I think most of the current ghost stories are capable of a simple explanation, if one could only get an unvarnished statement of real facts from the witnesses. Usually, however, those on whose authority these stories rest, are constitutionally of such a nervous organisation that they are physically incapable of describing with exact accuracy what they saw or heard. When, as not infrequently happens, those who have seen visions admit to having felt that extremity of fear which bathes them in a cold perspiration, or makes their hair rise up straight on their heads (this last is not, I think, alleged by women), then there is all the more reason to doubt their testimony.

Undoubtedly curious things happen which do not admit of easy explanation, but they are not necessarily supernatural, or connected in any way with the return of the dead to the sight of the living. Dreams, again, are sometimes very curious, and it might be difficult to offer a reasonable explanation of some dream-experiences, especially those which lead to the backing of winning horses or the purchase of prize-tickets in a lottery. A really reliable dreamer of this kind would be a valuable investment; but, unfortunately, there is a want of certainty about even those who have, once in a lifetime, brought off a successful *coup*. Still, it has happened. I myself have heard a dreamer —who was also a dream-talker—place accurately the three first horses in a coming race; but I had not sufficient confidence in the "tip" to take advantage of it. In that case, too, the winner was a very pronounced favourite. Many people say they have dreamt of strange places, and *afterwards* seen those places in reality, and even been able to find their way about in them. It may be so. For myself, I cannot say I have ever had such an experience, but I believe (I say it doubtfully, because one may be deceived about journeys in dreamland) that I have often seen the same

places in different dreams, dreamed after intervals of years, so that, while dreaming, I have at once recognised the place as a familiar scene in my dreamland. But those places I have never beheld on earth. In my early youth, scared by tales of the bottomless pit and the lake of brimstone, I used to dream, almost nightly, of those places of torment; but it is a long time ago, and I have quite forgotten what they were like. I have no ambition to renew my acquaintance, or to be given the opportunity of comparing the reality with the nightmare of my childish imagination and a cramped position. Apart from these more or less vain considerations, I have known some very curious coincidences, and I will tell you the story of one of them.

I was journeying in a strange, a distant, and an almost unknown land. More than this, I was the guest of the only white man in a remote district of that country. It was a particularly lovely spot, and, being an idler for the moment, I asked my host, after a few days, what there was of interest that I could go and see. He said he would send a servant with me to show me a cemetery, where were buried a number of Englishmen who, some few years before, had been

killed or died in the neighbourhood, during the progress of one of England's successful little military expeditions. That afternoon I was led to the cemetery in question. I have seldom seen a more glorious succession of pictures than were presented by the view from that lovely spot; and never in any country have I beheld a more ideal resting-place for the honoured dead. It did not surprise me that my host told me he had already selected his own corner, and repeatedly made it the objective of his afternoon walks. Within a fenced enclosure, partly surrounded by graceful, ever-green trees, lay the small plot of carefully kept grass which formed the burial-ground. It occupied the summit of a rising ground commanding a magnificent view of the surrounding country. From the gate the ground sloped steeply down to a road, and then dropped sheer forty or fifty feet to the waters of a great, wide, crystal-clear river, flowing over a bed of golden sand. Under this steep and lofty bank, the base all rock, the river swirled deep and green; but it rapidly shallowed towards the centre, and the opposite shore, seven hundred feet distant, was a wide expanse of sand, half-circled by great groves of palms, and backed by steep, forest-clad hills. The river made a wide

sweep here, so that, looking down on it from such a height gave it rather the appearance of a huge lake narrowing into the distant hills. Picturesque villages lined both banks of the river, the houses showing splashes of colour between the trees. Boats of quaint build—sailing, poling, paddling, rowing—passed up and down the broad stream, giving life to the scene; while at distances varying from three miles to thirty or more, the valley was shut in by lofty mountains, green near by, with their garment of unbroken forest, but, in the distance, blue as an Italian sky. I drank this in, felt it all as a feeling, this and much more with which I will not weary you, and then I turned to look at the grass-covered mounds and wooden crosses that marked the graves of the exiled dead. I was standing in front of a somewhat more pretentious headstone, which marked the resting-place of an officer killed a few miles from this spot, when, through the wicket, came a messenger bearing a letter for me. The cover bore many post-marks, signs of a long chase, and here at last it had caught me in my wanderings. I did not recognise the handwriting, but when I had opened the letter and looked at the signature, I realised that it was that of an old lady who was

but an acquaintance, and one of whom I had not heard for years. I read the letter, and I may confess to some little astonishment. It told me that, hearing that I was leaving England for a long journey, and that I should eventually arrive at somewhere in the East, the writer wished to tell me that her daughter (whom I hardly remembered) had married a certain soldier, that he had been killed some time before, and was buried in some place (which she tried indifferently to name) where there were no Europeans. If I should ever be in the neighbourhood, would I try to find his grave, and tell them something about it; for they were in great grief, and no one could relieve their anxiety on the subject of their loved one's last home.

It seemed to me a somewhat remarkable coincidence that I should, at that moment, be standing in front of the stone which told me that, underneath that emerald turf, lay all that was left of the poor lady's son-in-law, the grief-stricken daughter's husband. The situation appealed to my artistic instincts. I sat down, there and then, and, with a pencil and a bit of paper, I made a rough sketch of the soldier's grave; carefully drawing the headstone, and inscribing on it, in very plain and very black print, the legend

that I saw in front of me. Then I went home, and, while the situation was hot upon me, I wrote, not to the mother, but to the widow, a little account of what had occurred, using the most appropriate and touching language I could think of, to describe the scene and my deep sympathy. Finally I enclosed the little picture, which I had drawn with such a compelling sense of my responsibilities, and the unique character of the opportunity, to show that I was a man of rather uncommon feeling. Much pleased with the result of my efforts, I entrusted the letter to my friend (there was no such thing as a post-office), and we became almost sentimental over the chastened tears with which my letter would be read by the two poor ladies.

The mother's letter to me had wandered about for two or three months before it came to my hands; but I learned,—ages afterwards,—that my letter to the daughter was a far longer time in transit; not the fault of my friend, but simply of the general unhingedness of things in those wild places.

The letter did at last arrive, and was handed to the widow on the day she was married to a new husband. That is why I believe in the quaintness of coincidences.

XXII

OF A COUNTRY-HOUSE CUSTOM

I WENT one morning to a hotel in London to call upon a celebrated writer of fiction, a lady, and she told me that, as a protest against ideas which she despised, she always locked her door when she was talking to a man. I stayed there about two hours, but I don't remember whether the door was locked or not, probably not; no one, however, tried it, and my reputation survived the ordeal. The practice is unconventional, though innocent enough. It is much more common to find yourself in a lady's room, at night, in a country-house in England, and there you may talk to a friend, perhaps to two, and even, on occasions, smoke a cigarette, while the door is seldom locked. Do you see any harm in it? The thing itself is so pleasant that I do not mean to discuss with you the fors and againsts; I am satisfied that it is often done, and

that I sometimes profit by the arrangement. A century ago, or rather more, it was common enough, if not in England, certainly on the Continent, and the guest was sometimes present while the lady lay in bed, or made her toilette. It is conceivable that this custom deserved to be discouraged, and it seems to have gone out of fashion, no doubt for sufficiently good reasons.

I was once a guest in a delightful country-house in the heart of England, a house where nothing was lacking that could contribute to comfort, and where the hostess was attraction sufficient to draw visitors from the uttermost parts of the earth, and keep them with her as long as she desired their presence. She was wayward (an added charm), and the company came and went, and some came again, but none remained long enough to become overpoweringly tedious or compromisingly *épris*. It was winter, the hard earth was full of "bone," the waters icebound, and the face of the country white with a thick covering of frozen snow. There were but few of us in the house, and we had been skating on the ornamental water in a neighbour's park, miles away. That was the only form of exercise open to us, and we had enjoyed it. The long walk over the crisp snow and the uneven cart tracks of

a country road, the intoxicating ease and rapidity of motion over the glassy ice, the ring of steel on that hard, smooth surface, how distinctly they all come back! And then the trudge home in the gathering dusk, between the woods whose snow-laden trees looked the very picture of winter,—it was all delightful and exhilarating, and, if our dinner-party was small, it was certainly a merry one. When we parted on the stairs it was close on midnight, and I was standing enjoying the blaze of my fire and the intense cosiness of my room, when there came a knock, and what I had thought was a cupboard-door opened to admit the head of our charming chatelaine, with an inquiry as to my comfort and contentment, and an invitation to put on a smoking-jacket and have a cigarette in her snuggery. I very eagerly and gratefully accepted that offer, and a few minutes later found myself in the most delightfully warm, cosy, and withal artistically beautiful room the heart and mind of woman could desire or design. This boudoir faced the front of the house, and looking over the lawn and terraces were three French windows, through which streamed bright rays of moonlight, for the shutters were not closed. Within, a great wood fire blazed on a wide hearth of olive-green tiles. Two lamps, with shades

of *vieille rose*, shed a soft glow over inviting-looking chairs, thick carpet, tables littered with books and papers, lovely bits of porcelain and bronze, treasures in burnished silver and dull red gold. Every chair looked as if it were made for comfort, and the whole room said unmistakably, "This is where I live." I should have noted the general effect at a glance, but I had time to appreciate the details, for, when I entered, I found the room unoccupied. In a few minutes my hostess appeared from her room, which opened out of this fascinating retreat, and said—

"Well, how do you like my snuggery; is it not cosy?"

I said it was charming and delightful, and everything that good taste and an appreciation of real comfort could make it.

"I am so glad," she said; "will you smoke one of my cigarettes?"

"Thank you, yes."

"Shall I light it for you?"

"That would be most kind."

"There; now we can make ourselves quite comfortable and have a real good chat, and no one will come to disturb us. What have you been doing with yourself all this time? What new friends have you made? What books have

you been reading? Tell me all about everything. I think you would be more comfortable over there; don't worry about me, this is my favourite seat, but I change about and never sit very long in one place. You can imagine I am your Father Confessor, so don't keep me waiting; tell it all, and keep back nothing; you know I shall be sure to find you out if you try to deceive me."

I found a seat—not exactly where I had first wished to place myself, but where I was put—and our chat was so mutually interesting that I was surprised to find it was 2 A.M. when my hostess told me I must go to bed. I must have smoked a good many cigarettes, and I have a vague recollection that there were glasses with spiritual comfort as well; it is probable, for nothing that any reasonable human being could want was ever lacking there. I know that I lingered, and the white light through the curtains drew us both to the window. Never shall I forget the incomparable picture of that snow-covered landscape;—glittering, scintillating under the silver radiance of a full winter moon, riding high in a clear, grey, frosty sky. The absolute stillness of it; not a sign of life; the bare trees throwing sharp shadows on the dazzling whiteness

of a prospect broken only by the evergreens of the garden, the cleared stone steps of the terraces, and beyond, a small stream winding through the narrow valley, and forming a little lake of as yet unfrozen water, its ever rippling surface showing black and sombre under the shadow of a high bank which shut out the moonlight. The contrast between that outside,—the coldness, the whiteness, the sense of far-into-the-nightness, which somehow struck one instantly; and the inside,—the warmth, the comfort, the subtle sympathy of companionship with a most fascinating, most beautiful, perfectly-garmented woman: it was too striking to be ever forgotten. The picture has risen unbidden before my eyes on many a night since then, under other skies and widely different circumstances.

Turning away from the window, I could see through an open door into my companion's room, and I said, "How did you get into my room?" "Very easily," she answered; "there is a cupboard in the thickness of the wall between your room and mine; it opens into both rooms, but is at present full of my gowns, as you would have seen had you had the curiosity to look in, and the door happened to be unlocked."

I said I had abundant curiosity, and would gratify it when I got back.

My hostess smiled and said, "There is nothing to find out now; I have told you all there is to tell. Good night."

"But," I said, "why should I go all the way round, through cold passages, when I can walk straight through to my room by this way?" and I pointed to the open door.

"That is very ingenious of you," she answered; "and you are not wanting either in the quick grasp of a situation, or the assurance to make the most of it. You do not deserve that I should pay you such a pretty compliment! It is too late for banter; I am getting sleepy. Good night."

XXIII

A MERE LIE

AS the tale I am going to tell you is only a lie, you will understand that it is not of my making; I cannot even pretend to have heard it at first hand. The author was a scientist who lied in the intervals between his researches. It was a relief, I suppose, after too close contact with the eternal truths of Nature. His mental fingers seemed to wander over the keys of an instrument of romance, striking strange chords and producing unsuspected effects in an accompaniment to which he sang a perpetual solo.

Amongst the most eccentric of his class the Professor would still have been a remarkable character. No one seemed to know to what nationality he belonged, and it was useless to ask him for any information, because of the doubt which clouded any statement that he made. Indeed, to put it shortly, he lied like a tombstone. When I met him his

only companion was a Papuan boy, so black that a bit of coal would have made a white mark on him ; and the Professor would affectionately stroke the child's head, and say that when he had grown bigger, when his skull was fully developed, he meant to take it, and was looking forward to the day when he could examine it carefully, inside and out, and compare it with the skulls of certain wild tribes which, he felt certain, he should thus be able to prove were of true Melanesian origin. He would then sometimes relate how, during a visit to Cadiz, he took a great fancy to the head of a Spaniard whom he met there. He thought the man was in failing health ; but as he could not waste time in the Peninsula, he looked about for some means of hastening the possibly slow progress of disease The Professor soon found that the owner of the head had a reckless and profligate nephew, with whom he scraped acquaintance. To him the Professor said that he had observed his uncle, and thought him looking far from well, indeed, he did not fancy he could last long, and, explaining that he was himself an anthropologist, concerned in scientific studies for the benefit of humanity, he arranged with the nephew that, *when his uncle died,* the Professor should pay a sum of

£30 and be allowed to take the uncle's head. The uncle died shortly afterwards, and the money was paid, but the nephew, a man without principle, buried his relative in defiance of his bargain with the Professor.

The means by which the man of science secured full value for his investment made one of his best stories; and some day I may tell it to you, but, when I began this letter, I had quite a different adventure in my mind, and I will take the liberty of asking you to suppose that the collector of skulls is telling you his own tale in his own way.

"I was in Australia, where I had already met with some strange experiences, the last of them a disastrous expedition into the desert, where, when I was quite alone and a thousand miles from the nearest habitation, I fell over two precipices, first breaking my right and then immediately afterwards my left leg. I got back to civilisation with some difficulty, as I had to crawl on my hands most of the way, dragging my broken legs behind me; but what really made the journey seem long was the fact that I had to forage for my own sustenance as well. I was somewhat exhausted by these hardships, and was giving myself a short holiday for rest, when Australia was moved to a pitch of

the greatest excitement and indignation by the exploits of a daring bushranger, who set the Police and the Government at defiance, and established such a panic in the land that a party of Volunteers was formed, sworn to track the outlaw down and bring him in alive or dead. I do not say that I had any ultimate designs on the man's head, but still the skull of a person of that type could not fail to be interesting. So, partly as a relaxation, but mainly in the cause of science, I joined the expedition.

"It would not interest you to describe our failures—how the man outwitted us; how, just when we thought we had him, he would slip through our fingers, partly by his own skill, his knowledge of the bush, and the excellence of his horses, but mainly, I think, by the help of sympathisers, who always gave warning of our movements and most secret plans. I will pass over all that and take you to the final scene in the drama.

"When we were not actually in the bush we were following our quarry from one country-place to another, as the information we received gave us a clue to his whereabouts. It seldom happened that we passed a night in a town, and, when not camping out, we were billeted on the people of

the district, the wealthiest and most important of them being too glad to place their houses at our disposal. One evening, after a hot pursuit, feeling sure we were close upon the trail of our man, we reached a great house where a number of guests were already being entertained. In spite of our numbers we were welcomed with effusion, and, after dinner, the ladies of the party took advantage of the sudden arrival of a number of young fellows ready for anything to get up an impromptu dance. I am not a dancing man—my time has been spent in communion with Nature, in reading in the open book of Truth—therefore I left the revellers and went to bed.

"We had had a long and a hard day in the saddle, and I was weary, and must have fallen asleep almost as soon as I lay down.

"Now I must tell you what I afterwards heard from others of my party. It was a little after midnight, and the dancing was going on with great spirit, when I—this, of course, is what they tell me—suddenly appeared at a door of the ball-room in my night-dress, with a rifle in my hand, and, without hesitation, I walked through the room and out into a verandah that led towards the back of the house. My head was thrown

somewhat back, my eyes were wide open and seemed fixed on some distant object, while I was evidently unconscious of my immediate surroundings.

"I fear my sudden entry into the dancing-room in such a very unconventional dress was rather a shock to some of the ladies. I am told that several screamed, and one or more of the older ones fainted; but for myself I knew none of this till afterwards. It appears that, what with astonishment at my appearance, and the necessary attentions to the ladies whose nerves were upset, a little time elapsed before any one thought of following me. Then some one fancied he heard the sound of a horse's feet, and the men of my party pulled themselves together and made for the stables, as that was the direction I seemed to have taken.

"I was nowhere to be seen; but a stable door was open, and my horse, saddle, and bridle had gone. Then the matter began to look serious, and, as my friends saddled their horses and started to look for me, riding they hardly knew where, there were rather dismal forebodings of the probable fate of even a fully-clad man luckless enough to be lost in the Australian bush. It was a lovely starlight night with a young moon, and, under other circum-

stances, the ride might have been pleasant enough; but the aimlessness of the whole business was becoming painfully evident to the searchers, when the sound of a rifle-shot was distinctly heard at no great distance. The horses' heads were turned towards the direction from which the sound came, and the troop pushed on at a brisk pace. Almost immediately, a faint column of smoke was perceived, and as the horsemen approached the spot, the embers of a dying fire shed a slight ruddy glow in the darkness. The word was passed to proceed with caution, but the party was already so close that they could see my white night-dress, as I stood with naked feet by the side of my horse, regarding, with a half-dazed expression, the smoking rifle which I held in my hand. Sixty yards off was the thin column of smoke rising from the dying fire.

"I was surrounded by my friends, who all spoke at once, and fired a perfect volley of questions at me. I said, 'Softly, gentlemen, softly, and I will tell you all I know about it, for indeed the situation seems strange enough. As you know I went to bed. I slept and I dreamed. I suppose I was over-wrought, and my mind was full of the bushranger, for I thought I was again

on his track, out in the bush, on horseback and alone. It was night, but I seemed to be riding with a purpose, or my horse knew where he was going, for by-and-by I was drawn towards a thin column of white smoke, the smoke of a wood fire, and then, as I got nearer, I caught the flickering glow of dying embers. I *felt* the object of our search was there, and I moved forward with extreme caution, till I had got within a hundred yards, and then I distinctly saw the outlaw lying perfectly straight on the ground, his feet towards the fire, and his horse hobbled hard by. I say I saw the outlaw, but I was dreaming, and in my dream I *knew* it was the man, though I could not see his face. I dismounted, and, leading my horse, I got to within sixty yards of the sleeper. Then, fearing that if I went nearer he might wake and escape me, I took a steady aim, pulled the trigger, and—the next instant I was wide awake standing here in my night-dress.'

"Almost before I had finished I saw men looking towards the fire, which was no dream, and we all of us now distinctly made out the form of a man, lying on his side, almost on his face, with his feet towards the embers and his head by the bush. Moreover, we could both see and hear a

horse, that was evidently hobbled not very far from the sleeper. It did not take long to surround the spot where the man lay; but, as we rapidly closed in on the sleeper, he never stirred. A moment more and we were beside him. A dark stream, on which the glow from the fire seemed to shed some of its own red light, was oozing slowly from beneath the man's chest; and, as several hands turned his face up to the stars and the pale moonlight, it was too evident that he was dead, and that his life had gone out with that crimson stream which flowed from a bullet wound in his heart.

"I did not know the man myself, but several of our party recognised him. It was the bush-ranger, and, as I expected, his skull was not without features of special interest to science."

XXIV

TIGERS AND CROCODILES

WHEN I first came, a visitor, to the Malay Peninsula, I was struck by the fact that wherever I went I heard stories of tigers. If, in the course of a day's ride, I stopped at a village to eat my luncheon, the people who pressed round to watch me and have a chat would always tell me a tiger story of local and comparatively recent occurrence. Wherever I encamped for the night, I should be sure of at least one tale of successful attack or successful resistance, where a tiger had filled the principal rôle. When once I understood the little peculiarity, I took it as a matter of course, and at talking time I used to say, "Now tell me about the tiger: what was it he did?" It may have been accident, but it is no exaggeration to say that my question nearly always drew forth a more or less ghastly story.

Now that my visit is nearly over, it occurs to

me that, though I have accumulated an almost endless series of more or less interesting tales of the "low, crouching horror with the cruel fangs," I have not retailed any of them to you. In a certain number of cases I was myself near enough to be able to verify details, and in others I had means of proving main facts. One is almost bound to say that, because tiger-stories, which are worth repeating, are almost always listened to with incredulity, or, what is worse, with that banter which often means, in plain words, "What I have not seen myself I decline to believe." That is the attitude of England to the Orient in the presence of a tiger-story with which the auditors can claim no connection. I said that the prevalence of these tales struck me on my first arrival. I soon became *blasé*, and for a long time I have had no curiosity on the subject; but I will tell you of two tiger incidents that I personally verified, as far as I was able, and I will make no attempt to paint in the background with local colour, in order to supply you with finished pictures.

There is an island by the western shore of the Straits of Malacca. You would never guess it to be an island, for it is simply a block of mangrove-

covered mud, with one side towards the sea, and the other three sides separated from the mainland by deep but narrow lagoons of tidal water. The only inhabitants are a few wood-cutters, Malays and Chinese, who live in huts of mat or bark with palm-leaf roofs, while they are employed cutting mangroves and a hard-wood palm called *Nibong*. The huts of the Chinese are on the ground, but the Malay dwellings are invariably raised a few feet above the damp soil, and to them entry is obtained by means of a ladder. These hovels are very carelessly built; they are of flimsy materials, only intended to last for a few months, when they are abandoned and rapidly fall to pieces. They serve their purpose. The occupants are out from dawn till afternoon, when they return to cook, eat, and sleep; and so, from day to day, till the job on which they are engaged is completed, and they can return, in the case of the Malays, to their families, while the Chinese are probably moved to another scene of similar labour.

I was obliged to tell you this; you would not understand the story otherwise.

The island covers an area of several thousand acres, but except for the few wood-cutters it was, at the time I write of, uninhabited. At

one spot there was a hut containing two Chinese, near it a Malay house with eight or ten men in it, and at no great distance a large shed with nearly a score of Chinese. One dark night, about 11 P.M., the two Chinese who lived together were awakened by a noise in that part of the hut where they kept their food. One of the two got up, struck a light, and went into the back room. Immediately there was a dull thud, as of a man knocked heavily down, and the poor wretch screamed, "Help me, it is a tiger!" His comrade at once got out of his mosquito-curtain, and sprang to his friend's assistance. Seizing him by the arm, he tried to free him from the clutches of the tiger, who already had a firm hold of the doomed man's leg. The tug of life and death did not last long, for the tiger pulled the would-be rescuer down on his face, and, the light having been extinguished in the struggle, the man's courage went out with it, and, in a paroxysm of fear, he climbed on to the roof. There he remained till daylight, while, close beneath him, within the narrow limits of the hut, the tiger dragged his victim hither and thither, snarling and growling, tearing the flesh and crunching the bones of the man, whose agonies were mercifully hidden. In the grey light which heralds

dawn, the watcher, clinging to the roof-ridge, saw the tiger drag out of the house and into the forest the shapeless remains of his late companion. When once the sun was fairly up, the survivor slid down, and without daring to look inside the hut, made his way to the nearest Police Station, and reported what had occurred. An examination of the premises fully bore out his statement.

A week passed. The Malays, whose hut was nearest to that visited by the tiger, were careful to bar their door after hearing what had happened; but in this case the precaution proved useless. Easterns, especially those engaged in severe manual labour, sleep exceedingly heavily, and the men of this household were aroused by a smothered cry from one of their number; the noise of a heavy body falling through the thatch having passed practically unnoticed. One of the party got up, lighted a torch, and was at once knocked down by a tiger springing upon him. In a moment every man had seized his heavy chopping-knife, and the whole party fell upon the man-eater, and, by the light of the fallen torch, hit so hard and straight that the beast suddenly sprang through the roof and disappeared. It was then, for the first time, discovered that this was the

means by which the tiger had effected its entrance, and it left by the hole which it had made on entering the hut. The first man attacked was dead; the second was taken to hospital, and there died of his wounds.

There was a fourth victim. I am not certain of the facts in that case, but he was severely injured and was sent to hospital, where, I believe, he recovered with the entire loss of his scalp. That filled up the cup of crime. Almost directly afterwards the murderer killed a bullock; the carcass was poisoned, and the next day the body of a tigress was found close by that of her victim. She was not very large, eight feet from nose to the tip of the tail; she was in splendid condition—teeth perfect and coat glossy—but her legs and feet were disproportionately large to the size of her body. On her head there was a deep clean cut, and one of her fore-legs was gashed, evidently by a Malay chopper. The most curious feature was that in certainly two out of the three cases the tigress, who always attacked by night, the only time when the huts were occupied, effected her entrance by springing on the roof and forcing her way through the thin palm thatching.

There is another tiger story that I can tell you

in two words. It is curious, it sounds highly improbable; but, after hearing it on the spot from the two men concerned, I believe it.

Quite recently it was the fruit season here, and, as is customary, two men were watching an orchard situated on the side of a main cart-road. The orchard was not enclosed in any way, and the fruit trees on one side actually overhung the road. The road was divided from the orchard by a rather wide but quite shallow ditch, that was always dry except during rain. Fifteen or twenty feet on the inside of this ditch was a tiny lean-to under the trees. The shelter consisted of a raised floor of split bamboos, covered by a palm-thatch roof, and a narrow sort of bench, also under the roof, but level with the floor. The bench was next to the high road.

On the night of which I write, one man was sleeping on the bench, the other on the floor of the shelter. It was fine, with a young, early-setting moon; the scattered houses of a considerable village were all round, and there was nothing to fear.

I said before that natives sleep soundly, and you must believe it, or you will never credit my story. About 1 A.M. the man sleeping on the floor of the shelter heard his friend shouting for

help. The voice came from the ditch by the road, and thither the man ran, shouting "What is the matter?" "Thieves!" promptly replied the other, but a moment's conversation dispelled the idea born of his partially-awakened intelligence, and led them to the true interpretation of the riddle. The man in the ditch said then, and says now, that he was asleep, and knew nothing till he suddenly found himself thrown in the ditch, when he awoke and shouted, "Help, thieves!" But, all the same, when he tried to get up, and his friend helped him to the shelter and got a light, it was seen that he had a deep gash in the shoulder, which kept him in hospital for nearly three weeks. The light also showed the track of a tiger up to the bench, thence to the spot in the ditch where the man was lying, and straight across the high road into another orchard. One other thing it showed, and that was a patch of earth on the top of the wounded man's head.

The friend's theory, shared by all the neighbours, is this. He points to the exact position in which the sleeper was lying, and how a post, from ground to roof, completely protected the back of his neck, so that the tiger could not seize him as he must have wished to do. Owing to the

man's position, and the way the post of the house and the rails of the bench (for it had a sort of back) ran, the tiger had to take a very awkward grip of his prey, catching him by the shoulder, and therefore carrying him with his head almost on the ground. Three or four steps, a second or two in time, would bring him to the shallow, dry ditch. It was so shallow that he would not jump it, but the in-and-out of a tiger with a kill would be the equivalent of a jump. In he would go easily enough, but the cut slope of the ditch and the slight rise into the road on the other side just saved the man's life, for the top of his head hit against the edge of the ditch, and, awkwardly held as he was, knocked him out of the tiger's mouth.

Once dropped, the beast would not return to pick his prey up again, especially with one man shouting and the noise of the other coming to his assistance.

The tiger is the scourge of the land, the crocodile of the water. They seem to be complement and supplement—each of the other: the "golden terror with the ebon bars," the very embodiment of vitality, sinew, and muscle—of life that is savage and instant to strike—and the stony-eyed, spiky-tailed monster, outwardly a lifeless, motionless

log; but, once those pitiless jaws open, it is only a question of what tooth closes on the victim, whether it be "The last chance," "Tear the shroud," or "God save your soul."

I was starting for some hot springs in a remote spot, far in the interior, where I was certain of finding both elephant and rhinoceros, and the second night of my journey I spent at the junction of two large streams. Strolling back from a swim in the river, the local chief told me this pathetic story of fruitless heroism.

The country hereabout is very sparsely peopled, only a few scattered huts breaking the monotony of the virgin forest, Malays and wild tribes the sole inhabitants. Every house is on the bank of a river, and beyond the produce of their rice-fields and orchards the people rely mainly on the water to supply them with food. The Malay is exceedingly cunning in devising various means for catching fish, but what he likes best is to go out in the evening, just at sundown, with a casting-net. Either he wades about by himself, or, with a boy to steer for him, he creeps along in a tiny dug-out, throws his net in the deep pools, and usually dives in after it, to free the meshes from the numerous snags on which they are sure to become entangled.

One evening, a few days before my arrival, a Malay peasant was netting in the river accompanied by his son, a boy of twelve years old. They were wading, and, while the father moved along the edge of the deeper water under the bank, the boy walked in the shallows out in the stream. The short twilight passed, and the darkness of night was gathering over the waters of the wide river, when suddenly the father was startled by a cry from the boy, and, as he turned, he shuddered to hear the one word, "crocodile," come in an agonised scream from the poor child. Dropping his net, the man swam and stumbled through the shallowing stream to the boy's rescue. The child was down, but making frantic, though hopelessly ineffectual struggles to free himself from the grip of a crocodile which had him by the knee and thigh. The man was naked, except for a pair of short trousers; he had no weapon whatever, yet he threw himself, without hesitation, on the saurian, and with his hands alone began a struggle with the hideous reptile for the possession of the boy. The man was on the deep-water side of his foe, determined at all costs to prevent him from drowning the child; he had seized the creature from behind, so as to save himself from

its claws, and he tried to find, through darkness and water, the eye-sockets, by which alone he could hope to reach a vulnerable joint in its impenetrable harness. The father's fury and despair guided his hands to the reptile's eyes, and pressing his thumbs with all his might on these points of less resistance, he inflicted such pain that the creature gave a convulsive spring which threw the man backwards into the water. But the boy was released, and the saurian retired from the fight to sulk and blink over his defeat in some dark pool beneath the overhanging grasses of the river bank.

The man carried the boy on shore, and thence to his home; but the poor child was so severely injured that, with no skilled surgeon to attend him, he died after three days of suffering.

XXV

A ROSE AND A MOTH

WHEN I came again to this enchanted mountain, above the steaming plains, the first thing I did was to wander in the garden, amid the sweet-smelling blossoms and the bees and butterflies, and feast my eyes upon the ever-new loveliness of the changeless hills, the changeful sky and sea, that crowd the prospect with a thousand pictures of infinite beauty and inspiring grandeur. Then I saw a perfect rose, a rose of divine, deep colour—betwixt rubies and red wine—of the texture of finest velvet, and I gathered it. Once, long ago, at least so it seems, you gave me the fellow of this rose, plucked from the same tree. To me this flower will always suggest you, for, beyond the association, there are certain characteristics which you share with it, "dark and true and tender," a rare sweetness of perfume and, in the heart of the rose, a slumbering passion, the

like of which will some day wake you to the joy or the sorrow of life. I have treasured that sweet-scented blossom as long as it would stay with me; and now, when the petals are falling, I see that they are the counterpart of three rose-petals that had travelled from far over sea in a letter from you. They came the bearers of their own message, and now I seem to read it. Have I been very dense, or am I only fatuous now? Why can't they speak, these things you have touched, or do they speak and I lack understanding? At least you sent them, and that is much from you. I am grateful, and if I am a prey to vain imaginings, you will forgive me, and understand that I did not, presumptuously and with indecent haste, set about the construction of a castle that, even now, has but my wish for its unsubstantial foundation.

Last night, this morning rather, for it was between midnight and 1 A.M., I was reading that very weird story about a phantom dog. I was deeply engrossed in the weirdest part of it, when I heard a buzzing noise, and in a dark corner behind the piano I saw a pair of very strange eyes approaching and receding. They were like small coals of fire, extraordinarily brilliant, with

a pinkish flame, shedding light as well as containing it. I realised that they were the eyes of what looked like a very large moth, whose wings never ceased to move with marvellous rapidity.

My chair was touching a table on which was a long vase of perfume-laden lilies, white lilies with yellow hearts, and by-and-by the moth flew to the flowers and stood, poised in air, before a lily-blossom. There were two very bright lights on the table, and the creature was within two feet of me, so I saw it plainly enough. The wings never for an instant stopped their vibration, and it was so rapid that I could not tell their form or colour. Once directly opposite the flower, the moth produced a delicate proboscis, which it inserted into the blossom, and then slowly pushed it right up the stamen, apparently in search of honey. When extended, this feeler was of quite abnormal length, at least two or three inches. What, however, surprised me was that, having withdrawn the probe (for that was what it looked like, a very fine steel or wire probe, such as dentists use), the instrument seemed to go back into the moth's head, or wherever it came from, to be again extended to sound the depths of another blossom. There! it is past midnight,

and I hear the buzzing in the next room; here it comes; and I can examine the creature again. Alas! what a disappointment: this is a horned beetle. I thought it made over-much noise for my interesting friend. Now to continue my tale.

I observed the moth had a large, dark, cigar-shaped body, with two longish *antennæ*, much stouter than the proboscis, and infinitely shorter. After pursuing its researches into the internal economy of several lilies, the thing flew into my face, and I ought to have caught and examined it, for then the feeler had disappeared; but I was surprised and rather alarmed, and I thought it would return to the flowers, and I could again watch, and, if necessary, catch it. It made, however, for a dark corner, and then buzzed about the wooden ceiling till it came to an iron hook from which hung a basket of ferns. I was carefully watching it all the time, and at the hook it disappeared, the buzzing ceased, and I concluded the creature had gone into a hole where it probably lived. To-day, in daylight, I examined the ceiling all round the hook, but there was no hole anywhere.

Now is this the beginning of the dog business, and am I to be haunted by those fiery eyes, by

the ceaseless clatter of those buzzing wings, and the long supple feeler that suggests the tortures of dentistry, and may probe deep into the recesses of my brain? It can't, I think, be liver, for I have not yet learnt on which side of me that useful organ lies, and it is not drink. If it is only a moth of a rather uncommon kind, I suppose the fire in its eyes is to light it through the darkness; but I never before saw a moth going into raptures over flowers, and I can't yet understand where it puts away that instrument of torture, unless it winds it round a bobbin, inside its head or its body, when not using it. It reminds me of a man I saw swallowing swords at the Aquarium. I was quite willing to admire and believe, until he took up a sword, the blade of which, by outside measurement, stretched from his mouth nearly to his knee, and swallowed it to the hilt at one gulp. Then I doubted; and the knotty sticks, umbrellas, and bayonets, which he afterwards disposed of with consummate ease, only increased my dislike for him. Still this proboscis is not an umbrella, and though it is about twice as long as the moth itself, and seems to come out of the end of its nose, I know so little of the internal arrangements of these creatures that I dare say this one can, by

winding the instrument up like the spring of a watch, find room for it in its head. Why the thing won't keep its wings still, and sit quietly on the petals of the flower while it thrusts that probe into the lily's nerve-centres, I can't imagine. Then one could examine it quietly, and not go to bed in fear of a deadly nightmare.

Perhaps, after all, it is the result of reading about that "Thing too much," that starving, murderous cur, at 1 A.M.; if it is, I had better go to bed now, for it has just struck the hour. Am I wrong about the message of the rose? You see how hard I try to do your bidding.

XXVI

A LOVE-PHILTRE

THERE is, to me, something strangely attractive about Muhammadan prayers, especially those fixed for the hour of sunset. Time and again I have gone in with the Faithful, when the priest chants the *mu'azzin*, and I have sat by and been deeply impressed by the extraordinary reverence of the worshippers, while eye and ear have been captivated by the picturesque figures against their colourful background, the wonderfully musical intoning of the priest, and the not less harmonious responses. I do not pretend that this oft-repeated laudation of God's name, this adoration by deep sonorous words and by every bodily attitude that can convey profound worship, would appeal to others as it does to me, even when I have to guess at the exact meaning of prayers whose general import needs no interpretation.

The fifth hour of prayer follows closely on that fixed for sundown, and the interval is filled up by singing hymns of praise led by the priest, or by telling, and listening to, stories of olden times. Of Eastern places the Malay Peninsula had special attractions for me, and the few European travellers I met there, and who, like myself, were not bound to a programme, seemed equally fascinated. Most of them either prolonged their stay, or determined to return for a longer visit.

It is difficult to say exactly wherein lies the spell, but there are beauties of scenery, the undoubted charm of the people (as distinguished from other Easterns), and the sense of mystery, of exclusiveness, of unspoilt nature and undescribed life, that arouse a new interest in the wearied children of the West. It is pleasant to get at something which is not to be found in any encyclopædia, and it is, above all, gratifying to obtain knowledge direct and at the fountain-head. This is why I often return, in thought, to the narrow land that lies between two storm-swept seas, itself more free from violent convulsions than almost any other. There, is perpetual summer; no volcanoes no earthquakes, no cyclones. Even the violence of the monsoons, that lash the China Sea and the

Indian Ocean into periodical fury, is largely spent before it reaches the unprotected seaboards of the richly dowered peninsula.

Forgive this digression. I was sitting with the Faithful, and the first evening prayer was over. The brief twilight was fast deepening into night. The teacher excused himself, and the disciples pushed themselves across the floor till they could sit with their backs against the wall, leaving two rows of prayer-carpets to occupy the middle of the room. I had asked some question which, in a roundabout way, led to the telling of this tale.

"I remember all about it," said a man, sitting in the corner; "he was a stranger, a man of Sumatra, called Nakhôdah Ma'win, and he gave the girl a love-potion that drove her mad. He was a trader from Bâtu Bâra, and he had been selling the famous silks of his country in the villages up our river. Having exhausted his stock and collected his money, he embarked in his boat and made his way to the mouth of the river. Every boat going to sea had to take water on board, and there were two places where you could get it; one was at Teluk Bâtu on our coast, and the other was on an island hard by. But, in those days, the strait between the coast and the

island was a favourite haunt of pirates, and Nakhôdah Ma'win made for Teluk Bâtu to get his supply of fresh water. He was in no hurry, a week or a month then made no difference; so he first called on the chief of the place, a man of importance, styled Toh Permâtang, and then he began to think about getting the water. Now it happened that Toh Permâtang had four daughters, and the youngest but one, a girl called Ra'ûnah, was very beautiful. When there is a girl of uncommon beauty in a place, people talk about it, and no doubt the Nakhôdah, idling about, heard the report and managed to get sight of Ra'ûnah. At once he fell in love with her, and set about thinking how he could win her, though she was already promised in marriage to another. These Sumatra people know other things besides making silks and daggers, and Nakhôdah Ma'win had a love-philtre of the most potent kind. It was made from the tears of the sea-woman whom we call *dûyong*. I know the creature. I have seen it. It is bigger than a man, and something like a porpoise. It comes out of the sea to eat grass, and, if you lie in wait for it, you can catch it and take the tears. Some people eat the flesh, it is red like the flesh of a buffalo; and the tears are red, and if you mix

them with rice they make the rice red; at least, people say so. Anyhow, Nakhôdah Ma'win had the philtre, and he got an old woman to needle the way for him, as one always does, and she managed to mix the dûyong's tears with Ra'ûnah's rice, and, when the girl had eaten it, she was mad with love for the Nakhôdah. He stayed at Teluk Bâtu for a month, making excuses, but all to be with Ra'ûnah; and he saw her every day—with the help of the old woman, of course. You can't go on like that for long without some one suspecting something, and, though I never heard for certain that there was anything really wrong, the girl was mad and reckless, and the Nakhôdah took fright. She was a chief's daughter, while he was a trader and a stranger, and he knew they would kill him without an instant's hesitation if Toh Permâtang so much as suspected what was going on. Therefore, having got the water on board, the Nakhôdah put to sea, saying nothing to any one. In a little place people talk of little things, and some one said, in the hearing of Ra'ûnah that the Bâtu Bâra trader had sailed away. With a cry of agony the girl dashed from the house, her sisters after her; and seeing the boat sailing away, but still at no great distance, for there was little breeze, she rushed into the sea and made frantic

efforts to tear herself from the restraining arms of her sisters, who could barely prevent her from drowning herself. At the noise of all this uproar a number of men ran down to the shore, and, when they saw and heard what was the matter, they shouted to the Nakhôdah to put back again. He knew better than to thrust his neck into the noose, and, though they pursued his boat, they failed to catch him.

"When Ra'ûnah saw that she could not get to her lover, and that each moment was carrying him farther away, she cried to him to return, and bursting into sobs, she bemoaned her abandonment, and told her tale of love in words of endearment and despair that passed into a song, which to this day is known as Ra'ûnah's Lament.

"Yes, I can remember the verses, and will repeat them if it does not weary you. The Nakhôdah never returned.

"Oh, shelter! my dear shelter! the palm stands in the plain.
The fruit of the nutmeg falls to the ground and lies there.
Thine is thy sister, small but comely,
Thy diamond! the light of Permâtang Guntong.

Oh, my shelter! I hear the measured splash of the oars;
I see the drift-weed caught in the rudder.
Thou art above, my protecting shelter;
I am beneath, in lowly worship.

A LOVE-PHILTRE

Oh, my shelter! 'twas the hour of evening prayer
when thou settest sail;
The oars are straining and the boat reels along.
God's mercy is great, His promise sure;
By His blessing we shall meet in the Garden of
Paradise.

Oh, my shelter! the breeze is blowing in fitful gusts;
Be careful not to pull the sail to the left.
In three months and ten days,
Thou wilt return, my brother!

Oh, my shelter! make for the island, Sri Rama;
For there are two marabouts and a fish-weir.
Though thou leavest me, be not long absent;
In two, at most in three, months, return again.

Oh, my shelter! the waters of the sea are calm,
Yet do not hug the shore.
Have no fear of my betrothed;
Was not thy sword but lately sharpened?

Oh, my shelter! thou camest to Teluk Bâtu,
And the peace of my heart has gone.
Satan delights in my undoing,
For my heart cleaves to thine.

Oh, my shelter! take good thought,
The passions war with the soul.
Do not waste the gold in thy hand,
Lest scoffers have cause to mock thee.

Oh, my Nakhôdah when the mattress is spread, who will lie on it?
Who shall be covered by the folded coverlet?
Who will sit upon the embroidered mat,
Or lean against the great round pillow?

Oh, my Nakhôdah! the feast is waiting, but who will eat it?
The water is cool, but who will drink it?
The napkin is there, whose mouth can it wipe?
The sireh is ready, but who will use it?
Thy Sister is cold, who will fondle her?
Ah-hu! ah-hu! come death, deliver me.'

"And then she fell to weeping and moaning, struggling with her sisters, and trying to cast herself into the sea.

"That is the tale of Ra'ûnah and Nakhôdah Ma'win, and every one knows it. Some tell it one way and some another, but that is how it came to me. The girl was mad, mad with love and regret for six months; and then her father married her to another man, and that cured her. I knew the man: he was a foreigner. She and two of her sisters died long ago, but the other is alive still.

"How to get the dûyong's tears? Oh, that is easy enough. You catch the sea-woman when she comes up the sand to eat the sweet grass on shore. I told you how to do it. You have to lie in

wait and she waddles up on two sort of fins that she uses like feet, helping with her tail. If she sees you, she tries to get back into the sea, but you stand between her and the water and so catch her. Then, if you want her tears, you make a palisade of sticks in the deeper water of the bay through which she came, and there you bind her in a sort of cage, at the surface of the water, so that she can't move. It is like the thing they put elephants in when they are half-tamed. When she finds she is held fast there, and cannot get down into the deep water to her young, she weeps, and as the tears stream down her face you catch them, sweep them into a vessel, and you have the philtre."

There was a pause. Then a man said, "I hear they sell dûyong's tears in Penang."

The teller of the story at once replied, "Very likely, I have heard it too; but it is probably only some make-believe stuff. You must try it before you buy it."

"How do you do that?"

"Easily. Rub some of the philtre on a chicken's beak; if it is really potent, the chicken will follow you wherever you go!"

"Have you seen that yourself?"

"No. I want no love-philtres. I manage well enough without them. I don't care to play with a thing you can't control. I might get into trouble, like Nakhôdah Ma'win. It is easy enough to give the potion, but I never heard what you do to stop it. Anyhow, if I wanted to buy the stuff, I should first try it on a chicken, and if it had no effect I should not believe in it, for every one knows that the story of Ra'ûnah and Ma'win is true, or they would not sing about it to this day. Hark! the teacher is calling to prayer."

A number of boys' high-pitched voices were chanting—

"*Bihak-illah, rizal-l' Allah!*
A'ain-nu na, bi-aun illah!"

and, across their chorus, came the sonorous, far-reaching tones of the priest—

"*Allah-hu akbar!*
Allah-hu akbar!
Ashâd-du Allah, illah-ha il-Allah."

When the little group of men had fallen into their places, and the only sound in the building was the musical intoning of the half-whispered prayers, I could not help musing on the extraordinarily happy expression, "he found an old

woman to *needle* the way for him." Nothing could be more delightful than the symbol of the small, insinuating, finely tempered, horribly sharp bit of steel that goes so easily through things, and leaves no trace of its passage. And then there is nearly always a thread behind it, and that remains when the needle has gone!

I have translated Ra'ûnah's lament for you absolutely literally, except that the word which occurs so often, and which I have rendered "shelter," means "umbrella." The umbrella here, as in other countries, is an emblem of the highest distinction: a shelter from sun and rain, a shield and protection, "the shadow of a great rock in a dry land." A yellow umbrella is a sign and token of sovereignty.

XXVII

MOONSTRUCK

ONCE I suggested to you that the greatest facts of life are, in English, expressed by the smallest words, and, with that dainty, hesitating manner that is so captivating, you almost consented to agree. Look, for instance, at these words: God, sin, good, bad, day, night, sun, moon, light, dark, heat, cold, earth, sky, sea, world, peace, war, joy, pain, eat, drink, sleep, love, hate, birth, death. They cover a good deal of ground, and you can easily add to them. A philologist would tell you why the most profound conceptions, the most important abstract facts, are denoted by simple words, but the explanation might not interest you. The circle of my acquaintances does not include a philologist; my nearest approach to such dissipation is a friend who pretends to be a lexicographer. Now look at that word, it is long enough in all conscience,

but the idea which it represents only makes one tired.

Whilst a good reason could be found for expressing original principles in monosyllables, I wonder if any one can say why that fantastic product of this century, the (so-called) educated Indian, revels in the use and misuse of all the longest words he can find to convey his, sometimes grotesque, but nearly always commonplace, thoughts, when he tries to put them in English. Curiously enough, this transcendental language, which is the peculiar pride of the Indian babu, leaves on the mind of the listener no concrete idea, no definite conception of what the speaker wants to say; but it does invariably conjure up a figure typical of the class which employs this barbarous tongue as a high-sounding medium in which to disguise its shallow thoughts. And then one feels sorry for the poor overthrown words, the maimed quotations, and the slaughtered sentences, so that one realises how happy is that description which speaks of the English conversation of East Indians as a *mêlée*, wherein the words lie about "like dead men on a battle-field." There must be something in the Indian's character to account for this; and, as a great stream of words pours

from the narrow channel of his mind, and gives expression to his turgid thoughts in an avalanche of sound, so you will see the same extravagance of outward display in the manner of his life, in his strange garments, his sham jewellery, and his pitiful and disastrous attempts to ape what he thinks is the riotous "fastness" of the quite white man. Behind this outward seeming, there is also, in many cases, nothing, and sometimes even less than that. Misapplied English education has a good deal to answer for, and, if the babu has a soul, it may demand a reckoning from those who gave it a speech in which to make known the impossible aspirations of a class that is as rich in wordy agitation as it is poor in the spirit and physique of a ruling race. Many babus cannot quench revolt. Perhaps the babu is the "thing too much" in India; they could do without him. And yet he and education, combined, make a growing danger that may yet have to be counted with. But enough of the babu; I cannot think how he got into my letter.

. . . . .

My visit to this strange and beautiful country is over. For the last time a steamer is hurrying me down one of those great waterways which,

until recent times, have been the only means of getting into this mysterious land. The dying day supplied a feast of colour, of momentarily changing pictures that, however familiar, seem always new, always resplendent with amazing lights, delicate half-tints, and soft shadows, such as only a moisture-charged atmosphere and a fiery sun can produce. Does the thought of such an evening ever come back to you, or are you trying to accustom yourself to the greys and neutral tints of the life of resignation? Ah! The moon is just rising; the scene is quite enchanting, and I must try to tell you exactly what I see.

The river is six or seven hundred yards wide. It is high tide, and, to the eye, the picture has but three component parts—sky, wood, and water. Sky and water are divided by a belt of wood which borders the river. The continuous belt of trees, of varying height, growing from out the river and up the bank, makes a deeply indented line of vegetation. This belt is unbroken, but it rises into plumes and graceful fronds, where some loftier palm or giant jungle-tree towers above its neighbours, and all its foliage shows clear as an etching against the grey-blue background. Again, the belt dips and leaves broken spaces of

sky, where the foliage suddenly dwarfs. The sky is dark grey just above the trees, but the grey changes to blue as the eye travels upward, and overhead the zenith is sapphire, cloudless sapphire spangled with stars. The water is like burnished gun-metal, and, under the shore, there is a shadow as dark and wide as the line of trees which throws it. The moon, a perfect circle of brilliant light, not silver nor gold, but the colour produced by silvering over a golden ground, has just risen, and rides a short space above the trees. In the deepest shadow, exactly where water and land meet, there is a narrow streak of amazingly bright light; then a space of darkness, covered by the shadow of the trees, and then a veritable column of gold, the width of the moon, and the length of the moon's distance above the trees. The column is not still, it is moved by the shimmer of the water, and it dazzles the eyes. The effect is marvellous: this intense brilliance as of molten gold, this pillar of light with quivering but clearly-defined edges, playing on a mirror of dark burnished steel. Then that weird glint of yellow flame, appearing and disappearing, in the very centre of the blackest shadow, and, above all, the Queen of Night moves through the heavens in superb consciousness of

her own transcendent beauty, calmly satisfied to recognise that the sapphire firmament, and all the world of stars, are but the background and the foils to her surpassing loveliness.

As the moon rises, the reflection in the river lengthens, widens, breaks into ripples of amber, and shoots out arrows of paler light. Soon there is a broad pathway of glittering wavelets, which opens out into a great silvery road, and the light of the risen moon dispels the grey fog that hung over the belt of jungle, and tinges with silver the few fleecy clouds that emphasise the blueness of their background. Then a dark curtain gradually spreads itself across the sky, dims the moonlight, veils the stars, and throws a spell over the river, hiding its luminous highway, and casting upon the water the reflection of its own spectre-like form.

. . . . .

The fog clung to the river, but when we reached the sea the moon reigned alone, paling the stars and filling the air with a flood of delicious light. I was leaning over the side of the ship, wondering where I could ever see such a sight again, when a man of the country came and stood by me. I said something to him of the beauty of the night,

and he answered, "Yes, there are flowers in the moon."

I asked him what he meant, and this is what he told me :—

"It was a night like this, and I was going with my mother, my wife, and child to a neighbouring island to visit some relatives. We were travelling by a small steamer, and in the early hours of the morning were coasting along the shore of the island. The moon was then setting, but it was extraordinarily brilliant, and I tried to find a spot in the shadow where I could sleep. As I settled myself comfortably, I noticed that my mother was standing, looking over the bulwark. It might have been an hour later when I awoke, and, as we were near the port, I went to rouse my people and collect my luggage. I could not find my mother anywhere. The rest of my party and all the other passengers were asleep till I roused them, and no one had seen or heard anything unusual. We all of us searched the ship in every direction, but without success, and the only conclusion was that the poor old lady had somehow fallen overboard. By this time the vessel had reached the anchorage, and there was nothing to be done but to go ashore. I took my family to the house of

our friends, some miles from the landing-place, and then wondered what to do next. The village we had come to was on the shore, and not very far from the place where I had last seen my mother on board the ship. I determined, therefore, to drive to a spot as nearly opposite that place as I could get, and then to walk along the beach, and ask at the huts of the Chinese fishermen whether they had seen a body in the water. The first two or three cottages I came to were empty, but I made my way to a solitary hut which I saw standing in the centre of a tiny bay. In that hut, to my surprise and great joy, I found my mother and two Chinese fishermen. The men told me that they had gone out before daylight to set their nets, and in the light of the moon, then almost on the horizon, they saw a woman, as they described it, "standing in the water," so that, though her head only was visible, she seemed to be upright, and they imagined she must be supported somehow, or resting her feet on an old fishing stake, for the water was fifteen or twenty feet deep there. She did not cry out or seem frightened, only rather dazed. They rowed to the spot and pulled her into the boat, and just then the moon sank out of sight. The old lady

had lost her skirt, but otherwise seemed little the worse, and, as far as the fishermen could see, she was not resting on any support. When I asked her how she got into the sea, she said she could not tell, but she was looking at the moon, and she saw such lovely flowers in it that she felt she must try to get to them. Then she found herself in the water, but all the time she kept looking at the flowers till the fishermen pulled her into their boat and brought her on shore. I took her to the house where we were staying, and I have left her in the island ever since, because I dare not let her travel by sea again."

XXVIII

THE "DEVI"

I AM in Agra. The Japanese say that if you have not been to Nikko you cannot say *kekko*. That is an insular conceit, meant, no doubt, originally for Japan and the Japanese only; but national pride—speaking as the frog spoke who lived under half a coconut-shell, and thought the limits of his vision comprised the universe—now declares that the Nikko temples are incomparable. I cannot claim to have seen all the great buildings in the world, but I have visited some of the most famous, and I say with confidence that the Tâj at Agra is the most perfect triumph of the architect's and builder's skill in existence. I visited this tomb first by daylight, and it is difficult to give you any idea of the extraordinary effect the first sight of it produced on me. I drove in a wretched two-horse gharry, along a dusty and uninteresting road, until the

rickety vehicle was pulled up with a jerk in front of a great red stone portal, and I got out. Through that lofty Gothic arch, and framed by it, appeared a vision of white loveliness, an amazing structure of dazzling marble, shooting towers and minarets into a clear, blue, cloudless sky.

The Tâj—the Crown of Kings—stands on a raised terrace; it is a considerable distance from the gate, and the eye is led to it by a wide, straight path, bisecting a garden, which, at the first glance, seems a mass of dark green foliage. The garden is extensive, and shut in by a high wall. Just outside this wall, to right and left of the Tâj, are a palace and a mosque of deep red sandstone. More than that you cannot see, but the river Jumna flows under the rear wall of the raised terrace on which the Tâj stands.

The marble monument, which contains the tombs of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, is an enormous building, and represents seventeen years' work of a force of twenty thousand men. But the design is so faultless, the proportions so perfect, the whole effect so exquisitely graceful, that, until you are close to the wide steps leading up to the terrace, and realise that men standing by the walls look

almost like flies, you are not struck by any sense of extraordinary size.

The building itself is superb. The conception is absolutely unique, and the harmony of every part a crowning triumph ; the splendour of material, the purity of that dazzling, unbroken whiteness—these are a joy and a delight.

But the surroundings, the setting in which this jewel stands, are so marvellously well calculated to exactly frame the picture, that the whole scene seems a vision, unearthly in its beauty. When once that sensation passes, when one has gazed, and blinked, and rubbed one's eyes, and compassed the reality of it all, one is profoundly impressed by the genius that could raise such a heavenly edifice, and one is proudly thankful to have lived that hour of life, to have felt the soul stir, and to carry away an imperishable memory of one of the noblest of human achievements.

The main entrance is by a great arched door, bordered by Arabic characters in black marble let into the white wall. Pierced marble windows admit a dim and softened light to a lofty chamber. In the comparative gloom one slowly discerns a marble wall surrounding the centre space. The wall is inlaid with precious stones—jasper and

onyx, sardius and topaz, amethyst, chrysobel, and sapphire, set in floral designs. Within this enclosure are the white marble tombs of Shah Jahan and his wife.

Last night the moon was full, and, an hour before midnight, I went and sat in that dark stone palace, and revelled in the beauty of a spectacle that cannot be equalled on earth. It is said that the palace was built for Royal ladies, and was specially designed to give them the most perfect view of the Tâj. There is an open stone verandah, over which I leaned and gazed in ecstasy at the scene. The dark trees of the garden spread from under the walls of the palace over a wide space of ground, and from them rose the incomparable Tâj; minarets, walls, and windows, blazing with silver sheen under the direct rays of the moon, softened in the half shadows, darkening to deep tones of grey on the river face. Slightly to the left of the Tâj, and as far beyond it as the Tâj was from me, stood the mosque, a splendid foil to the glittering radiance of the tomb. In the shadow, cast by the great mass of marble, rippled the shallow waters of the wide river. The rear walls of the building are on the edge of the bank, and beyond the Tâj the river stretches away in

a silver ribbon towards the city. In a line to the right of the Tâj, and distant about three miles, rises a dark hill, crowned by the Palace and Citadel of Agra. The enclosing walls and battlements, built of the same red sandstone, were scarcely distinguishable from the hill; but the moonlight caught the white marble buildings within, and innumerable lights twinkled from walls and windows.

I must have been a long time in my solitude, intoxicated by the wonder of the night and the splendour of the scene, when I heard the strains of a violin, played with extraordinary skill. The music seemed familiar (for I had heard the songs of many Eastern lands), and, moreover, I became certain that the instrument was being played somewhere in the great building wherein I chanced to be. The sounds ceased, but presently the musician began a Persian dance which I recognised; and as the wild air leaped from the strings in quickening waves of sound, the devilry of the mad nautch seemed to possess me, and it became impossible not to beat time to the rhythm of the music. Again there was silence, and I wondered greatly who could make a violin throb with such feeling, and where the minstrel could be. Whilst

still absorbed by these thoughts, and anxiously listening for the faintest sound, my ear caught the strains of an Arab love-song that I knew well enough, but had never heard played like this before, nor yet under such circumstances. The air was in the minor key, and was, I knew, played only on three strings, but it seemed to wail and shiver from the instrument out into the night, through the trees, across the bright lights and deep shadows, to mingle with the crooning of the river, to fill the atmosphere and soar towards the empyrean. It was like the song of a lark at the dawn of a day in spring. The power of the musician was such that Tâj and city, mosque and river and garden faded away, and I distinctly saw a narrow street in an Arab town. Flat-roofed buildings, pierced by a few small iron-barred windows, lined either side of a street, which rose in a gentle ascent till it twisted out of sight round a distant corner. A brilliant moon, shining in a cloudless sky, threw into white light the roofs on one side the street. But the houses on the other side cast a deep shadow, and in that shadow a man, with his back to me, was standing playing the three-stringed Arab *gambus*, and singing—singing as though for his life, in a low, sweet

voice—up to a barred window whence issued a ray of yellow light. I thought I could even understand the words of the passionate *serenata*, though I know almost as little of the Arabic as of the Patagonian tongue. It was the music, the angelic skill of the violinist, which had bewitched me, and I stood enthralled by that soul-entrancing melody.

Before you write me down an emotional ass, remember where I was, and try to imagine what I saw, what I heard. I cannot expect to impress you with any true idea of either scene or song.

While those yearning, thrilling, imploring waves of sound cried to the exquisite beauty of the night, I was spell-bound. But, in the silence that followed, I reasoned that the music came from above me, probably from the roof, and that I might well seek the author of it. I passed through a maze of passages, where light and shadow alternated, and, as I groped about to find a staircase, I was guided to my object by the strains of the violin, and a gleam of light which, striking through a narrow window, disclosed a winding stair.

As I expected, the stairs led up to the roof, and

I was not a little surprised by what I saw there. The head of the staircase was in a corner of the great flat space forming the roof, and a parapet, about thirty inches high, completely enclosed it, except for a flight of outside steps leading down to another and lower roof. The cement floor and surrounding parapet were so brilliantly lighted by the moon, that every inch unshadowed was as bright as day. Four people occupied the space, and my eye was first caught by a white-robed, dark-complexioned boy, who, leaning against the parapet, played a violin with closed eyes, his face set in an expression of dreamy rapture. At a little distance from him, but nearer to me, were a woman and two girls. The woman sat upon a quantity of silks spread over the parapet, while she leaned against a pile of cushions placed against a round stone column. I should say she was hardly twenty. Her skin was very fair, her complexion wonderfully clear, her hair black and abundant, her eyes large, dark, and liquid, while long curling lashes threw a shadow far down her cheeks. The eyebrows were strongly marked and slightly arched, like the artificial spur of a game-cock. Her nose was straight and rather small; her scarlet lips made a perfect Cupid's bow, and the

upper lip was so short that it disclosed teeth of extreme regularity with a whiteness and sheen as of pearls. The chin was round, the face oval; the ears, hands, and feet very small, but beautifully formed. This woman, or girl, was clothed in silk skirts of a dull red, heavy with gold thread; she wore a jacket of white satin, embroidered with small red and gold flowers, and fastened by three diamond brooches. On her head, falling in graceful folds over her shoulders, was a dark gossamer veil, studded with tiny gold stars, and bordered by a wide hem of shining gold lace. In one hand she listlessly held a long spray of stephanotis. She seemed absorbed by the music, and the wonder of that soft white light, which so enhanced her loveliness that I stared in wide-eyed admiration, forgetful of Eastern customs, of politeness, and all else, save only that fascinating figure. At her feet, on the roof, sat two girls, attendants, both clad in bright-coloured silk garments, and both wearing gold-embroidered gossamer veils.

Not one of the group seemed to notice my presence, and I heard no words exchanged.

. . . . .

It was long past midnight; the violinist had excelled himself in pulse-stirring dances, in pas-

sionate love-songs and laments that sounded like the sobbing of despairing hearts. I had gradually moved forward, and was leaning over the parapet looking towards Agra, and feeling that no moment of a night like this could be missed or forgotten, when suddenly I heard a sharp cry, half of sur prise, half of dread. I turned and saw my four companions all gazing with startled eyes at something beyond me, out past the parapet, towards the glistening river. I turned again, and I now saw a white marble bridge stretching in a single graceful arch—an arch like a strung bow—springing from the centre of the back wall of the Tâj across the river, till it rested on the farther bank. There rose another Tâj! the exact duplicate of the one standing on the hither side of the stream, as white, as graceful, as perfect in all respects as its fellow.

The roadway of the bridge was enclosed in a sort of long gallery, the sides of marble fretwork, with windows at intervals opening on to the river. The roof was formed of marble slabs. One could see the shining water through the perforated walls of the gallery; occasionally, where two opposite windows were open, there were glimpses of the distant lights, the palace, and the hill. The beautiful flat arch of that bridge, its graceful lines, and

the airy lightness of the structure are unforgetable. Think of that bridge, that pure white bow of glistening stone, spanning the river's width, and tying Tâj to Tâj!

As I feasted my eyes, in wonder and admiration, on this alluring vision, a mist rose from the river, gathered volume and density, shut out the distance, enveloped bridge and river, bank and building, and hung in a thick white cloud, the ends creeping rapidly to right and left across the level plain. I looked upward; the moon was slowly sinking towards the west; it had a faint bluish tinge, a common effect at very late hours of the night, when it seems to shine with even greater brilliance.

I turned to look for my companions, but found I was alone. There was not a sign of lady, or maid, or minstrel. They had disappeared, vanished without a sound; and, of their late presence, there was no sign—except the spray of stephanotis. It was strange, I thought, as I walked to the spot where the flower lay and picked it up, but one cannot be astonished at anything in the East.

. . . . .

I felt a chill puff of wind, and I glanced back towards Agra. The mist was moving, rising

rapidly in wisps; it was thin and transparent, and I could indistinctly see the background through it. The marble bridge, the other Tâj—that second tomb Shah Jahan *meant* to build—were gone. Clearly my imagination, a mirage, or the mist had played me a trick. And then the girl, the violinist: were they also the phantoms of my brain? Surely that was impossible. Why, I can see the girl now; I could tell you every detail of her face, her figure, *pose*, and dress. The violinist could have been no spirit; though he played like an angel, his music was earthly, and perfectly familiar to me.

I gave it up and went away, wondering; but I took the stephanotis, and it stands in front of me now in a tiny vase of water.

. . . . .

To-day, in daylight, when the sun was high, and I had eaten and bandied commonplaces, and knew that I was sane, I went to find the old creature who keeps the gate of the garden of the Tâj. I asked him who was in the Red Palace late last night, and he said that not having been there himself he could not tell; moreover, that he did not turn night into day, but slept, like other respectable people. I felt snubbed but still curious, so I said—

"The boy who plays the violin, who is he?"

"What boy? Where? How should I know?" he said, but he began to look rather startled.

"On the roof of the Red Palace, over there," I replied, pointing to the corner of the building visible from where we stood. "And the lady, the young lady in the beautiful clothes, who is she?"

But the old man had started, and at mention of the girl he dropped the stick on which he leaned; and as he slowly and painfully recovered himself from the effort of picking it up, I heard him say, in an awe-struck whisper, "The *Devi!*"

My attempts to extract anything further from this old fossil were futile. He hobbled off to his den, muttering to himself, and evidently anxious to be rid of my society.

After this rebuff I hesitate to make further inquiries from others, because I know no one here; because the white people never concern themselves with native matters, and are mainly interested in gossip; and because I am conscious that my story invites doubt, and must rest on my word alone. It is not the personal ridicule I am afraid of, but I don't like the idea of jest at the expense of the girl whom I saw on that parapet, the *Devi* whose stephanotis perfumes my room.

XXIX

THE DEATH-CHAIN

WHEN last I wrote and told you about the *Devi*, I had a vague hope that my stephanotis would, indirectly, prove that the lovely girl, from whose hand it had fallen, gathered it in some heavenly garden, beyond mortal ken, where Death and Time are unknown.

I did not like to say so, but I meant to keep the flower, and, if I had seen it fade and die, I should have been disappointed, perhaps even rather surprised. You will say such fantastic ideas can only come to people whose minds have been warped by contact with Oriental mysticism; and, while you are probably right, I reply that when you have a Tâj, when you have an atmosphere of sunshine unsoiled by coal-smoke, when, in fine, any really big miracle is wrought in your Western world, then *you* may see a *Devi* sitting in the moonlight, *you* may hear angelic music played by a boy unknown to the

critics, and *you* may even weave romances round a spray of stephanotis.

I guarded my flower carefully, and, for five days, I could not see that it showed any sign of fading. True I kept it in water, even when I was travelling; and, if it came from a heavenly garden, I dare say that care was altogether needless; but we are creatures of habit, and my Faith was not very robust, and leaned somewhat heavily on Hope. I had to leave Agra and journey through Rajputana. On the fifth day from that night, which I had almost said "was worth, of other nights, a hundred thousand million years," I was in Jaipur, and from there I visited the glorious Palace of Amber. I restrain myself with difficulty from going into raptures over that ancient castle, which, for so many centuries, has stood on that distant hillside and watched its many masters come and go, while the ladies loved, and gossiped, and hated, in the Hall of a Thousand Delights, and the horsemen and spearmen went down from the gates to the dusty road, the seething plains, whence many of them never returned.

I will spare you. You are long-suffering, but there must be a limit even to your patience. I know that *qui s'excuse s'accuse*, and I offer no excuse

for trying to draw for you the pictures that are only seen beyond beaten tracks. Ruskin has said, "The greatest thing the human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and tell what it *saw* in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion all in one." If thousands can think for one who can see, surely there must be still thousands who see and cannot tell "in a plain way" what they saw. There are millions whose eyes are to them only what animals' eyes are—aids to the gratification of appetite. There are thousands more who do see and appreciate, yet cannot put what they have seen into words; cannot communicate their own feelings, cannot help another to share, even a little, in the joy that has come to them through greater opportunities. I have often wondered why people who have seen the most interesting places on earth, have been present perhaps on memorable occasions, and have met the most famous people of their time, showed, in their conversation, no sign of these advantages, and, if questioned, could only give the most disappointing, uninteresting description of any personal experiences. Then there are the very few who have seen, and can

help others to see again, through their eyes; but they seldom do it, because they have found that, with rare exceptions, the relation of their experiences is but little appreciated. Ruskin himself is one of the few who can see and can describe, but others may hesitate to string the plain words, knowing how little worthy they will be of what the eyes have seen.

Some of this I may have been thinking, as I slowly made my way back to Jaipur; but, when I reached the house of my sojourn, almost the first thing I noticed was that the tiny vase which had carried my spray of stephanotis was empty of all but water. Of course I sent for everybody, and made minute inquiries, and, of course, every one had seen the flower, and no one had touched it, and I was left to draw any conclusion I pleased.

I drew none. There are no data on which to come to a conclusion; but the facts remind me of a story I will tell you.

I have an Italian friend. He is a very uncommon type, and worthy of far more attention than I will give him now, because, for the moment, I am concerned rather with his story than with him. He was in Egypt, and whilst there he discovered a buried city. Carefully and wisely he

kept his knowledge to himself, till, owing to an absence of some months, he lost all trace of the place, and never found it again. A sand-storm had buried it once more.

The original discovery was purely the result of accident, and his first researches had to be conducted in secrecy, without assistance, otherwise the *trouvaille* would have become public property. His explorations led him to a building that he believed was a tomb; and having, by laborious efforts, gained an entrance, he had the satisfaction of proving that his surmise was correct, and also the reward of finding in the chamber a single sarcophagus, containing a mummified girl, or woman, in wonderful preservation. He knew the common superstition that disaster would befall any one who disturbed a mummy; but he thought little of the tale, and did not mean to be deterred from removing the body when he should have the means to do so. Meanwhile he had to be content with what he could carry, and that consisted of a few coins, and a necklace which he unfastened from the lady's poor shrivelled neck, or rather from the cere-cloths in which it was swathed.

Perhaps you have never seen one of these mummy necklaces; they are rather curious, and, from my

friend's account of it, the one he found nearly resembled others which I have seen myself. The material seemed to be some kind of pottery, or opaque glass made into rough beads, and short lengths of small glazed piping, strung together in a quaint pattern. The prevailing colour was a sort of turquoise with an extra dash of green, and every bit of piping was so tinted; but, alternately with these blue lengths, were strung groups of round beads, in bunches of two to six or eight, or even more. By far the majority of the beads were turquoise-blue, but some were yellow, others brown, and a few almost black, and the arrangement was such that it could easily have been made to represent a string of words. The effect of the chain was *bizarre* but attractive, and it somewhat resembled the rosaries worn by devout Arabs. The intrinsic worth of the thing was *nil*, but sometimes one has a friend who will accept and value *un rien* like this, for the sake of the giver, when jewels would be declined. My Italian had such a friend, and the bauble found a new home on her neck.

Not long after she had begun to wear the quaint little chain which had lain for so many centuries round the throat of the dead Egyptian, its new owner was distressed and alarmed by a persistent

form of nightmare, which gradually induced a feeling that she was haunted by the wraith of a dark-skinned girl, of a type of feature unlike any known to her, but clad in raiment such as she fancied had been worn by Egyptians in the days of the Pharaohs. The apparition was always clothed in the same manner, and though she wore a number of strangely fashioned ornaments, her neck was left completely bare. The girl seemed to be ever present in her dreams, and her face always wore a look of extreme distress, as of one who grieved for the loss of some dearly beloved friend or possession. The curious part of it was, that the dream-girl seemed always to come to the sleeper as to one from whom she could get relief; and while, in her earlier appearances, she had the expression and the manner of a supplicant, the dreamer fancied that latterly there had been a change, and the dark face looked both agonised and threatening.

These visitations, which could not be ascribed to any reasonable cause, had so got on the lady's nerves that she had gone for change to a villa on the coast of Normandy. The change of scene brought no relief. The haunting form of the Egyptian girl, though not a nightly visitor, was so constantly present, that the dread of seeing her

deprived sleep of all power of giving rest, and the poor lady was not only becoming seriously ill, but she was so affected by her uncanny infliction, that she even sometimes imagined she caught glimpses of her tormentor when she herself was wide awake.

One afternoon, the lady was lying in a darkened room, the *persiennes* closed to keep out the hot and penetrating rays of a summer sun. She felt very weary and despondent, the result of many broken nights and the prolonged strain on her nerves, and, though she held a book in her hand she was all the time wondering how much longer she could bear this oppression, and what she had done to deserve such a weirdly horrible fate. In a dull sort of way she supposed she must be going mad, and felt with grim cynicism that the borderland between sanity and insanity was so narrow that she would hardly realise the moment when she crossed it. There was absolute silence everywhere, except for the faint soothing whisper of the sea, rippling over the sand beneath the wooded bluff on which the villa stood. The air was warm and heavy with summer perfumes; the room was darkening slowly as the sun dipped towards the placid waters of La Manche; the woman was deadly weary, and she slept.

At first her sleep must have been sound; but, after a time, her eyes opened to that other consciousness which is of the world of dreams, and once again she saw her now dreaded companion, the dark-eyed, dark-skinned girl from the land of the Pharaohs. The girl seemed to plead in impassioned terms for something, but the dreamer could not understand the strange words, and racked her brain, as dreamers will, to try to imagine their meaning. The girl burst into a storm of tears, sinking to the ground in her grief and despair, and burying her face on a pile of cushions. Still the dreamer, suffering torture herself, was helpless to relieve the other. Then suddenly the girl sprang up, and, dashing the tears from her eyes, which now seemed to blaze with murderous resolve, she sprang upon the white woman, enlaced her throat with supple brown fingers, pressed and pressed, tighter and tighter—ah, God! the horror and the suffocating pain of it—and all the while the sleeper's hands seemed tied to her side. Then with a scream the dreamer awoke. She felt her eyes must be starting from her head, and instinctively raised her hands to her throat, only to realise that her vivid sensation of strangulation was merely a nightmare, but that the chain—the string of turquoise beads which she

had never unfastened from the day she first put it on—was gone.

There was now little light in the room, only enough to see things vaguely, yet the lady declares that in that first moment of waking she distinctly saw a figure, exactly like that of the girl of her dreams, glide swiftly away from her and pass out through a *portière* into the verandah. For some time she was too frightened and unnerved to move, but when at last she summoned her people they had seen no one.

The only thing that was real was that she had lost the necklace, and never saw it again. As some compensation she also lost for ever the society of her dream-visitor, and completely recovered her own health.

Now who took my stephanotis ?

XXX

SCANDAL AND BANGLES

FOR years I have not been so angry as I am at this minute; I have very nearly lost my temper, and the reason is really ridiculous. Why I should choose this as a favourable opportunity for writing to you I cannot tell, but my tormentor had no sooner left the room than I seized the pen, which is nearly always ready to my hand, and you are the victim. The cause of this unusual and unseemly frame of mind is a girl, quite a pretty girl, who walked in here, *sans cérémonie*, and, after a few minutes' desultory conversation, told me a preposterous piece of gossip about myself, a fantastic story in which there was not a grain of truth.

"Who says that?" I asked.

"Everybody says so."

"Then everybody is mistaken."

"Of course you deny it; but it is true, all the same."

"It is not in the least true, and I am prepared to swear that in any form of oath."

"I dare say you are, but no one will believe you."

"Very well. Now what does your story rest upon?"

"The evidence of people's senses. Every one has seen you."

"I cannot deal with 'every one,' it is too indefinite. You say I went to some one's house,—not that it would matter the least if I did,—but who saw me?"

"I did."

"You did! I never was in the house in my life."

"Try to remember. I have seen you go in and also seen you come out of it."

"If it were not so stupid, one might almost get angry. I repeat that I have never been in the house, nor spoken to the owner."

"And I, having seen with my own eyes, maintain that you have."

"You have mistaken some one else for me, or drawn on your imagination, for what you say is absolutely untrue. But, as you seem to have constructed a fantastic story on that insecure foun-

dation, I have a good mind to charge you with defaming me."

"By all means, and I will go into court and say what I know and you know to be true."

Now, what can you do with a person like that? If I were the judge, trying my own cause and knowing there is not a semblance of a particle of truth in this absurd tale, I believe that if a witness appeared and gave evidence against me with this sublime assurance, I would decide the case against myself.

The wasp has still a sting left, she says; "You sent your carriage to a lady, that she might drive in it?"

"I did."

"And she sent it back."

"She did."

"She would not use it because of what I have told you, and she does not want to see or speak to you again!"

I said I should not die of the affront, nor commit any rash act if the lady adhered to her determination; but I admit that, though I laughed, I was beginning to lose my temper, and I told my tormentor that if I could whip her it would be a satisfaction! She also laughed, but as I had seen that

she was brimful of merriment all along, that was nothing. By-and-by she disclosed that she wanted me to do something for her, and, when I had heaped coals of fire on her head by doing what she wished, she went away asking me if I had any message for the lady who had refused my carriage! I heard her laughing all the way downstairs, and, as she insisted on walking through the grounds to her carriage, I fancy I can hear her giggling still.

I think I remarked once before that the train of another's thoughts are not easy to divine, but explanations are boring, so I leave you to supply the connection between what I have just written and what now occurs to me to tell you. It is not only fowls and curses that come home to roost.

Once upon a time there was a very beautiful and attractive lady, the wife of a high official in India. She was of those who have but one admirer at a time, and that one very devoted. Women of her type cannot share with any one else the attentions of their cavaliers; they insist upon a service that is complete and unquestioning, dog-like in devotion and obedience; and they do not seem to care if it is also dog-like in its inability to do more than gaze in rapture at the face of its mistress. I have known cases of the kind myself, and marvelled to see how

the lady and her slave can stand, and sit, and walk together, with no one to disturb their confidences, and yet they never seem to speak. As far as I can understand, that was the case with the heroine of my tale and her *cavaliere servente.* They were on the hills or in the plains—it does not matter where—when a native Prince appeared upon the scene. He was a delightful and fascinating person, but wicked beyond the dreams of wickedness. He stayed several months in the station, and when about to return to his own native state, he called upon an English friend of his and said, "I am going away; I speak English very indifferently; I wish to say good-bye to some of my friends: will you come with me?" The Englishman at once said he would be delighted, and they set out on a round of calls, the Prince saying where he wished to go. Amongst other houses they visited that of the engaging lady, and after a few words explaining his early departure and regret, the Prince produced a number of beautiful gold bangles, and said he trusted the lady would accept them as a token of his respectful admiration. This was duly interpreted, and the lady replied that as her husband held a Government post she could not accept any present. The Prince said he trusted that she would not persist in this

determination, because he was merely a visitor, and as the lady's husband had no authority or influence in his territory, he could not believe that the ordinary rules would apply to a gift of such small value, which was merely an expression of his esteem and thanks for the kindness he had received. Meanwhile the bangles had been tendered to the lady; they had lain in her hand, and she appreciated their curious design and artistic excellence.

"What shall I do?" said the lady, appealing to the Englishman.

"What you please," he replied.

It is possible that it was out of consideration for the feelings of the donor that she then said—

"My husband would never let me accept the bangles, but I should like to keep them if I knew that you would say nothing."

"Pray do not think of me," said the friend; "I am an accident in the interview, and, when I leave the house, I shall have forgotten all about it."

"Then I shall keep them."

One evening, about a fortnight or three weeks later, the lady was dancing with the man who had interpreted, and he said, "Will you allow me to admire your bangles: they are not only beautiful in themselves but exceedingly becoming."

"Yes," she replied, "but the unfortunate part of it is that my husband thinks they have been given to me by some one else, and I can't enlighten him, for I dare not tell the truth!"

P.S.—The lady who refused to use my carriage has just sent me an invitation to dinner!

XXXI

THE REPREHENSIBLE HABIT OF MAKING COMPARISONS

I AM not given to the use of postscripts, but I indulged myself with one in the last letter I wrote to you. It reminds me of the only *bon mot* to which I can lay claim. When I was about six years old, my mother and I were visiting an aunt of mine, and, one evening, my mother read aloud to my aunt a letter she had just received. It was lengthy, and no doubt interesting to the two ladies, while the contents were probably beyond my comprehension. "Little pigs have long ears," and I noticed that, at the conclusion of the letter, my mother read "*P.S.*," and then some final sentences. Immediately afterwards I was ordered to bed, and, once there, my mother came to see me. My small mind was full of this new idea, and I was thirsting for information as to the meaning of these mysterious letters. Therefore, when my mother had

bid me good night and was going away, I said, "Mother, what does *P.S.* mean; is it Parting Subject?" She smiled and said, "No, the letters stand for *post scriptum*, but the meaning is not very different." She afterwards helped me to wrestle with the Latin grammar, and in time I arrived at the exact translation of *post scriptum*, but my childish rendering of *P.S.* would do just as well. I was made to bitterly regret having ever suggested it; for, when my proud mother told the story, my various brothers and sisters, separately and collectively, insisted that some one had told me to say it, and I am not sure that they did not, each in turn, give me a thrashing to impress upon me the vice of "trying to be sharp." When children have brothers and sisters, their schooling begins early and lasts a long time—fortunately for themselves and the world at large.

That, however, has nothing to do with the matter I was going to write about. I suppose you sometimes look through those galleries of garments which begin and end ladies' journals, just as I occasionally glance at the advertisements of new books, which I find at the end of a modern novel. The other day I was idly turning over the pages of such a series of advertisements (each page devoted

to one book, and quotations from the newspaper reviews of it), and I could not help noticing how, in the case of every book, if not in every *critique*, the author was compared with some well-known writer —Dickens, Thackeray, George Meredith, Zola, Ibsen, De Maupassant—it does not seem to matter who it is, so long as it is some one. As for Mr. Rudyard Kipling, a writer who mentions India, China, Japan, Siam, the French or Dutch Indies, or any place within two or three thousand miles of them, is certain to find himself compared with the astonishingly talented author of "Soldiers Three," "The Drums of the Fore and Aft," and a dozen other tales that had made Mr. Kipling famous in India years before his name had been heard in the West.

I know that whenever we visit a new place, we have a ridiculous desire to compare it with some totally different spot that is familiar to us; and I suppose we make the comparison, either because we want to show that we have been somewhere and seen something, or because we are so devoid of ideas or language to express them, that this comparison is our only means of description. Like London, only bigger; Petersburg in winter, but not so cold; bluer than the Mediterranean, and so on. It seems to imply poverty of resource; but if to help

readers to realise the appearance of a spot in New Zealand, that place is compared with the Carse of Stirling, the information is not of much use to those who do not know their Scotland.

Is it the same with literary critics? Hardly, I fancy; because even though they write easily of Lake Toba, the Thibetan highlands, or more or less known writers, it can't give them any real satisfaction, for their own names are but seldom disclosed.

Enlightened people who attend places of Christian worship, often wish that the occupant of the pulpit would read a sermon by some great divine, rather than stumble through an original discourse, which possibly arouses only the scorn, the resentment, or the pity of his hearers. The preacher who is conscious of his own want of eloquence, or realises that the spring of his ideas trickles in the thinnest and most uncertain of streams, may seek to improve his language, or replenish his own exhausted stock of subjects, by studying the sermons of abler men. I doubt if he is greatly to be blamed. Some illustrious writers have won renown after a diligent study of the works of dead authors, and a suggestion of the style of a famous master may be observable in the work of his admirer; just as a modern painter may consciously or unconsciously, follow the methods

the composition, or the colour schemes of a genius who has given his name to a school of imitators. It would, however, be a little unreasonable to compare all play-writers with Shakespeare, all essayists with Macaulay. If there is nothing new under the sun, two or more men or women, contemporaries, may have the same ideas on a given subject without either being open to a charge of plagiarism. They may express the same ideas differently, or put different ideas in somewhat the same style of language: both may have drawn inspiration from a more or less original source, not generally known or quoted—in all these cases comparisons may be, and often are, simply inept. Some subjects are not yet entirely exhausted, and while it is interesting to compare the different views of recognised authorities, it is annoying to both writers and readers to find that the highest flight of criticism of a new work seems often to consist in mentioning the names of other writers on the same subject—as though it were, in a sense, their personal property, or they had some vested interest in it, by reason of discovery or continual harping on that particular theme. I suppose reviewers, except in a few instances, have no time to really read the books they criticise, and judge them on their merits; but, if they could, it

would be more satisfactory to possible readers, who, as things are, can form very little opinion of what a book contains, its relative value or worthlessness, from statements like this, which purports to be an extract from a review in a leading London paper:—

"The opening chapters have a savour of Dickens; the climax is almost Zolaesque."

Or this:—

"The knowledge of character revealed reminds us of George Eliot's 'Scenes of Clerical Life.'"

You will think that one who wanders from an infantile legend about the word *postscript* to a growl anent newspaper reviews, is indifferently qualified to criticise any one or anything. As a letter-writer I acknowledge that I am inconsequent. I do not even seek to be otherwise.

XXXII

A CHALLENGE

OH! Oh! Oh! What a storm! But are you not a little unreasonable?

You are not a circulating library, you say, nor a railway book-stall; you don't want to hear tales of forest and flood which have no personal interest for you or me; and you cannot carry on a correspondence with a phrase-book, a thing that has no existence as a human being, and, when not lecturing you, or taking advantage of your good-nature to air boring platitudes, is doling out little stories to you, as though you were a child in a Sunday School.

My dear lady, I hope that you feel better after that tirade; but as you have attacked me with violence, and at all points at once, I claim the right to defend myself, and again I say you are unreasonable. We were never strangers to each other, or so it seems to me, but circumstances and a certain

mental attraction drew us into friendship. In the delight of your society I realised what it would be to me if, through that friendship, I might win your affection. I even dreamed that I might compel the impossible, and attain to an earthly paradise of sweet alliance whence no mortal promises and no inspired writings could ever win me.

Whilst we dream of life's big possibilities, its little duties drive us where they will. We were parted, and, if I do not now remind you of that time, it is because I know that there are few things a woman hates more than to be told she once, by word or deed, showed any tender feeling for a man who no longer holds the same place in her regard. You went and I stayed; you spoke and I believed; and what I did not say was only what you told me not to repeat, lest parting should seem over-hard to bear. Then I wrote and you wrote, and, at first, your letters were so fine a gift that they almost consoled me for your absence, and, in my great gratitude, I wrote some of the thoughts of my inmost heart. My fervour seemed to frighten you, and the chill of your surroundings came through your letters to me. It may have been the fault of those about you; it may have been that you were tried beyond endurance, possibly even that I, in

some indirect way, was a cause of your distress. But you never said so; you never took me into your confidence and frankly told me you were in any trouble; only your letters went through those phases which I, once, cynically suggested were the common fate of those whose friendship could not survive a real separation. I was too slow to at once trim my sails to the varying breeze, nor could I call back letters which were already on their way. Therefore I fell under your displeasure, and you ordered me to write only of "the daily round, the common task." I obeyed you, as nearly as I was able. When you asked me to tell you of what I saw, of what I was doing, I attempted to do so, and to make the telling as little personal as I could. To weary you with the trivialities of my daily life, to describe to you the wearisome people I met, the *banalités* they uttered—that was beyond me. Therefore, to try and interest you, I gave you the best of what had interested me, and even that was only done with some sacrifice, for you know my time is not all my own. Naturally those letters were empty of personal reference. To have written of myself would have been to write of you, and that might have brought down on my head another storm of invective. I am in the position of the

burnt child: I dread the fire. Even now I dare not accept your invitation. I might write, and, before the letter could reach you, receive from you another missive, telling me your present letter was written under an impulse you regret but cannot explain, and that of course it meant nothing. You would add that you delight in the discussion of abstract questions, and queer little stories are, to you, as rain to dry land. Then I can imagine the sternly traced characters of that other destroying scroll, in which you would sum up the tale of my sins, after reading such a letter as I might send in answer to your present message of discontent and provocation. So, I warn you. I shall give you time to think; in spite of your scoffing, I shall continue to write to you as I have done in these latter days; and then—and then—your blood be on your own head. If the outward cold of damp and fog, of weeks of sunless gloom and surroundings of rain-drenched rows of hideous dwellings, muddy roads, sullen skies, and leaden seas produce what you no doubt think is a virtuous frame of mind, when the state of the crops and the troubles of the farmers are the only matters with which a conscience-burdened woman can occupy her mind, I shall pander to your appetite, and write to you of famine

and plague, the prospects of the poppy (the opium poppy, you understand) and I will even stretch a point to discuss the silver question and the fate of the rupee. If, on the other hand, you throw discretion to the winds; if in that atmosphere where you say you are always frozen, "outside and in," you pine for a glimpse of sunlight; if you like to watch a conflagration when at a safe distance from the flames, or even if the contortions of the cockchafer, when impaled by the pin, excite your amusement; —then also I will help you to realise these very reasonable wishes. Yes, then I will write you a love-letter that will be but a poor substitute for the impassioned words that should stir your heart, were once my lips within reach of yours.

Even from here I see you smile; even now I hear you say, "Well, write—after all vivisection has benefited the race, and the contortions of the cockchafer will perhaps distract one's attention for a moment from the eternal monotony of the narrow life."

XXXIII

IN EXILE

IN order that I may keep on perfectly safe ground, and successfully resist the temptation to depart from my resolve, I will tell you a story of my visit to Burmah, where, wandering aimlessly, I found an old friend in a distinguished Indian civilian, who invited me to accompany him on a tour of inspection. I gladly accepted his invitation, and we had been travelling for some time, driving, riding, walking, and, finally, after rafting over a magnificent series of rapids, had been some days paddling down the river in house-boats, when we reached a remote inland station called Phatmah. I caught my first view of the place as our boat swung round a bend in the great river, disclosing a reach of brown water, enclosed between high, jungle-covered banks, and shut in, at the end, by a green hill, crowned by a plank bungalow with a mat roof.

The boat was soon alongside the rough landing-

stage, where a young civilian, introduced as Basset, was waiting to receive his chief. We climbed the steep hill, and Basset conducted us to the house devoted to our shelter for the couple of days we were to spend at Phatmah.

In my two days' stay there, I had ample opportunities of seeing the place, and realising its few attractions and its many drawbacks. There was a tiny native village on the bank of one of the two streams that here united in one great river, and flowed in stately, ever-widening progress for over two hundred miles before it reached the sea: two hundred miles of virgin forest, save for the native villages and clearings that lined the banks at uncertain intervals. A few jungle tracks leading to distant mines were the only apology for roads; the river was the real highway, and the sole means of transport were native boats. Comfortable enough, these boats, for men used to jungle travel; flat and wide, with a palm-leaf roof, the fore-part occupied by the crew, the after-part by passengers. There was a deck of boards or split bamboos, and you could only move about it by crawling on your hands and knees. Entrance and exit were accomplished by the same means. A door, at the back of the enclosed after-deck, led on to a bamboo

frame over the rudder; the steersman sat on the palm-leaf awning, and the only privacy was obtained by hanging a screen between crew and passengers. There was room for two mattresses on the after-deck, and there the passengers sat or lay through the blazing heat of the tropical day and the star-lit stillness of the Burmese night.

At this station there dwelt, besides Basset, an officer of police, another concerned with public works, and an apothecary in charge of a hospital. That was all. Their quarters were dotted about on the high land behind Basset's bungalow. For the rest, the eye was met by jungle—near and far—endless jungle, and the river-reach. Silent and placid the waters, moving along in brown eddies, when, as now, the river was in flood; clear and shallow, disclosing groups of rocks dotted about the bed, in what was called the dry season.

At the time of our visit it was spring, and the jungle, especially in certain parts of the mountainous country, was a truly marvellous sight. The forest had put on its wedding garment, and the new leaves of many, even of most of the trees, were dazzling in the brilliance of their colouring. The prevailing hues were red and yellow; but then there were shades of red and of yellow that one never seemed

to have dreamed of, such quantity, such intensity that the eyes almost ached with gazing at the glory of it all.

One is struck, especially in the East, by the wonder of flowering trees, or the striking creepers that cling to the tops of forest giants; but imagine these same trees in all their height, their wealth of foliage, and beauty of form, one mass of colour! There were trees of delicate lemon, of brilliant cadmium, of deepest orange; trees of such crimson that every leaf looked as though it were dripping with fresh blood; trees of copper and pale pink, of terra-cotta and scarlet—all these in one pure colour, or intermingled with every shade of green from palest apple, through varying tones of emerald, to the shining dark leaves that seemed all but black. Dotted about, here and there, stood trees of some shade of brown, or graceful forms clothed in darker or paler heliotrope. The virgin Eastern forest is a sight to see, but the glory of the jungle in the first freshness of spring leafage is a revelation.

That jungle was one of the attractions of Phatmah; —not monopolised by Phatmah, only shared, and not to so large an extent as by a thousand other places nearer the great hills.

Then there was the river reach, where all day

long the shadows crept gradually closer under one bank as they were projected from the other; while now and then a native boat passed up or down the river, and, for a few minutes, broke the melancholy of that changeless stretch of water. The sunsets made the last, and perhaps the greatest attraction of Phatmah. Then, in the after-glow, great beams of light would rise, fan-like, from east and west, almost meeting in the zenith, and leave, between their rays, sharply-defined, heavenly roads of deepest blue; while the soft white clouds, riding through the sky, took shades of gold and rose and pearly-grey, until the stars shone out and set all the cicadas shrilling a chorus to waken every other denizen of the jungle.

Sunsets cannot be commanded; they are intermittent, and, though they are comforting—in a way—they do not always come when they are most wanted. In Phatmah it would rain in torrents on the evening that you had set your heart upon seeing a gorgeous sunset, and, when it did not rain, it was hotter than in almost any other spot in Burmah, and that is saying a great deal. Moreover, it was as dull probably as any place on earth, except to the three white men who lived there and had their work to do, or whose business took them, weekly, or at

least monthly, into some other more or less desolate part of the district.

I noted these things in that first day I was at Phatmah, while my friend and Basset were talking about roads to be made and buildings constructed, natives to be encouraged or sat upon, dacoits harried, and all the things that make the life of the exiled English officer in the outermost parts of the Empire. I also observed Basset. I knew he had a wife, a girl whom he had just married, when at home on leave in England, and who was now in that house, across the grass, a hundred yards away. I had not seen Basset's wife, but I had heard of her from some who had met her, before she left the last confines of civilisation and started for what must in future be her home. What I had heard made it seem unlikely that Mrs. Basset would reconcile herself to jungle life, and, when I understood Phatmah, I thought it would be very surprising if such a miracle could be wrought for the sake of Basset.

Basset was a most excellent fellow, a good officer, good to look at, lithe and well-made, a man who had found favour with his seniors and was likely to do well. He was young, but that was a fault for which he was not responsible, and one that every

day was curing. And yet, when I saw Phatmah, I thought Basset had been unwise, and when I saw his wife, as I did the next day, I felt certain of it.

I had been told she was very young in years and child-like at that, nervous to the last degree, selfish, unreasonable, full of fancies, and rather pretty—but the one or two ladies who were my informants differed as to this last important particular.

What I saw for myself, when I went to call upon 'the only lady in Phatmah," was this: a glory of fair waving hair framing a young, but not very youthful face; a pallid complexion, and features where nothing specially appealed for admiration; a voice that was not more than pleasant, and a figure that, while very *petite*, seemed well enough shapen, as far as could be seen under the garment of silk and lace that must have been the first of its kind to visit Phatmah. The house did not strike me as showing more than the evidences of a young man's anxiety to make it what he would call "fit for a ady"; but then the resources of Phatmah were strictly limited, the Bassets had only just, so to speak, arrived, and things entrusted to the tender mercies of river transport were often months upon the way. On the whole there was nothing about

Mrs. Basset to excite either sympathy or interest, if you had met her in any civilised place; but as the only white woman in Phatmah, come here to gain her first real experiences of life, scared by frogs and lizards, and terrified by the many insects that fly straight at you and stick on your hair, your face, your clothes, one could not help feeling that the experiment, if not a cruel one to her, was at least thoughtless, and, if persisted in, might end in disaster.

My friend and I exerted ourselves that afternoon and evening (for the Bassets dined with us) to put as good a complexion as we could on Burmah in general and Phatmah in particular; and though, to the ordinary spectator, we might have appeared to succeed fairly well, I carried away with me vague suspicions, born of my own observation and the conversation I had had with the lady as we sat and looked over that jungle-shrouded river-reach, while the path to the stars grew an ever-deepening blue, and she told me somewhat of herself and her life. There was no doubt that she not only *looked* dissatisfied, but felt it, and said it, and took credit for her candour. Then she complained that Phatmah offered no opportunities for "getting into mischief," but that was probably

merely another way of saying that she was utterly bored; and, in truth, when she asked if I could conceive a greater dulness, the trite reply that she had her husband stuck in my throat, and I admitted that it was immeasurably dull, but talked cheerfully of what it would be when communication with the outside world was easier, and then fell to asking her if she read, or played, or sang, or sketched, as Phatmah seemed to be the very place for study, or the practice of accomplishments. She pleaded that she was too lately from school to hanker after study, but became almost enthusiastic on the subject of music.

Then our *tête-à-tête* was interrupted, and in the evening the only thing that struck me was that, for a girl so lately from school, our guest drank rather more in quantity and variety than was usual, and whenever in the after-days my thoughts went back to Phatmah, I remembered this with an uncomfortable feeling of the awful loneliness of that reach of brown river, the boundless forest, and the girl, left for days to her own devices, and the possibility of "getting into mischief" by drowning a craving, not for excitement so much as for the companionship of her kind.

A hundred miles below Phatmah the river wound

through the plains in long reaches, six or seven miles in length; the country was more open, and the banks were occasionally fringed with palms and orchards surrounding the huts of a native hamlet. The moon was waxing to the full, and, sitting at the stern of my boat, looking back up the long stretch of water bathed in mellow light, till the wide band of silver narrowed to a point that vanished in grey mist, I could not help thinking that, even here, the sense of loneliness, of monotony, and banishment, was less acute than in Phatmah's forest-bound clearing.

. . . . .

Years passed, and I was again in Burmah, this time with an object. I had forgotten all about the Bassets: one does not remember people who live in the East, only the places that are striking, and the things seen or heard of that may become profitable in one way or another. I thought of my friend, because he might be able to help me, but he was away in another part of the province and I had to journey alone. Officials are useful on their own ground, and even when they are not personal friends, they are, in the East at any rate, ready enough to be hospitable. The advantage of "entertaining angels unawares" is, however, all on their side, and

guests so soon recognise this fact, that they feel under no obligation to their hosts, and seldom wish to remember them if they meet them in Europe. This is specially the case with English notabilities, who seem to think that they have a prescriptive right, not only to waste a man's time, but also to use his house, stables, and servants, as at an hotel where the visitor exercises every privilege except that of making payment. Unfortunately for me, I had to go beyond the region of even occasional civilians, those isolated exiles whose houses the stranger occupies, whether the master is present or absent, and for some days I had to put up with the Dâk Bungalow and the chicken of happy despatch.

It was the very hottest time of the morning when I arrived at such a bungalow in a small mining village. I had been riding since dawn, and was glad enough to turn into that weedy compound and get off my pony. Whew! the heat of it! The two or three sinewy hens, which by-and-by would be slaughtered to make the traveller's holiday, were sitting half-buried and wallowing in the dust, with their wings spread out and their mouths open, gasping for breath. It was a day when solids liquefy, when inanimate objects develop an extraordinary faculty for sticking to each other, and

when water no longer feels wet. There was not a sign of any human being anywhere, and I went round to the back premises to try and find the caretaker. After a diligent search I discovered him, fast asleep of course, and, while he went to prepare a room, I unsaddled the pony and put it in the stable. Then I went into the house and told the servant to get me some food while I had a bath. The process of catching the hen and cooking her was a long one, and I was sleeping in a chair when the man came to tell me the feast was ready. I had an idea that I was not alone in the house, and, when I questioned the caretaker, he said that there was a lady who had arrived the night before and had not appeared that morning. Our means of conversation was limited to a few words, and I could not make out who the lady was, or even whether he knew her; but it seemed to me a curious thing that a white woman should be there, and I supposed she came from one of the big ruby mines; but even then it was strange that she should be alone. I made further inquiries about the neighbourhood, and learned that I was not more than a day's journey from Phatmah. I knew it was somewhere about, but had not thought it so near; it was not on the line of my objective, and I was not

interested in its exact position. Then some of my bearers arrived with luggage, and I deliberately settled myself for a siesta.

It was late afternoon when I awoke, and I determined to push on to another small place, which I could just reach before darkness made further progress impossible. Even a short stage by night would be preferable to the frightful heat and the oppressive atmosphere of this lonely house, in its neglected and overgrown garden, where one lean chicken now scratched alone. Just then the caretaker came to me and asked my advice about the other guest. He had seen and heard nothing of her for the whole day, and was afraid there must be something amiss. That, I felt, was extremely likely, especially when he told me he had knocked at the door of her room and received no answer. I did not at all like the mission, but there was nothing for it but to go and see what was the matter. A few steps took us to the door of the lady's room, and I knocked, first gently, then loudly, but no sound broke the ominous silence. Then I turned the handle, only to find that the door was locked. As I could not force it open without making a great clatter, I went outside to try the windows. There were two of these some height from the ground, and

it was difficult to get at them. The first was fast, and from my insecure footing I could not force it; but with the second I was more fortunate, and as a half-shutter sprang open, and a stream of light poured into the dark room, I saw the form of a girl, or woman, lying on the bed, in an attitude that somehow did not suggest sleep. I shouted at her, but she never moved, and then I climbed into the room. I noticed instantly that there was hardly anything lying about the ill-furnished room, but, on a small table near the bed, was an almost empty brandy bottle and a glass. The woman was dressed in a blouse and skirt, the only things she had taken off being apparently her hat and shoes. She had her back towards me, and the sunlight centred on a mass of fair hair and gave it a deeper tinge. Before I put my hand on her cold fingers I felt certain she was dead, and as I gently turned her head and recognised in the now grey features the face of the only white woman in Phatmah, I don't think I was very much surprised, though I was terribly shocked. Held tightly in her other hand was a small empty bottle that had once held chloral, and the faint sickly smell of it hung in the heavy stifling atmosphere of that bare and comfortless room. Poor lonely child, she had managed to "get into mischief" after all.

XXXIV

OF LOVE—NOT IN FICTION

YOU have sent me the answer which I expected. Now tell me how to write a love-letter that shall speak no word of love—a letter as full of the passion, the boundless adoration, and the faith of love, as the Chaurapanchâsika, those fifty distichs of Chauras that proclaimed his forbidden worship of the lovely daughter of King Sundava. The Brahman's lament won the king's heart and saved the poet's life; and I would learn of you how to win a heart, and perhaps save more than one life from shipwreck. After all, our civilisation may, in its comparative refinement, be more cruel than the unfettered caprice of an Eastern king nineteen centuries ago. Tell me, tell me, you who know, how can pen and ink be made to speak with the force and persuasion of spoken words, when half the world divides the writer from the reader of poor halting sentences that must, of

necessity, leave unsaid all that the heart yearns to utter?

When eye can look into eye, when the stretched-out hand meets a responsive touch,—timid and uncertain, or confident with the knowledge of passionate love passionately returned,—the words that are spoken may be feeble, but the influence of a loved presence will carry conviction, and one voice awaken in one heart the music of the spheres. Then the dullest day is bright, the lovers' feet tread on air, day is a joy and night a gladness, or at least a dream of delight. Then life is divided between anticipation and reality. No wonder the hours fly on wings; no wonder the thoughts suggested by brief absences are forgotten in the wonder and delight of briefer meetings, till the dread moment of separation comes, and aching hearts too late realise the appalling suddenness of the actual parting and the ceaseless regret for opportunities lost. You understand that my thoughts are not of the devout lover who is going through a short apprenticeship before signing a bond of perpetual servitude or partnership, as the case may be. That is a phase which, if it occasionally deserves sympathy, seldom receives it; indeed, it hardly awakens interest, except in those who wish to see

the preliminaries concluded, that their interest in the principals may either cease, and give themselves more freedom, or begin, and bring them some profit. I appeal to you to tell me how to keep alive the divine flame when oceans and continents divide two loving hearts; how to tell of longing and bitter regret, of faith and love and worship, when such words may not be written; how to make personal influence felt across five seas and through many weary months; how to kill doubt and keep strong and faithful a priceless love, against which the stars in their courses may seem ready to fight; how, above all, to help one who needs help, and warm sympathy, and wise advice, so that, if it be possible, she may escape some of life's misery and win some of life's joy.

Journeying through this weary old world, who has not met the poor struggling mortal, man or woman, old or young, for whom the weal or woe of life hangs in the balance, to turn one way or the other, when the slightest weight is cast into either scale? Who has not been asked for sympathy or advice, or simply to lend an ear to the voice of a hopeless complaint? Some feel the iron in their souls far more keenly than others. While the strong fight, the weak succumb, and the shallow do not

greatly mind, after they have gone through a short torture of what seems to them profound emotion. But in their case sympathy is rather wasted, for, however violent their grief, their tears are soon dried, and it must have been written for them that "joy cometh with the morning."

You know what it is when the heart seems to struggle for more freedom, because it is choking with a love it may not, or will not, express; when, in the absence of one face, all other companionship is irksome, all conversation stale and unprofitable; when daylight wearies and night is cruelly welcome, because the struggle to play a part, and pretend an interest one does not feel, is over, and one stretches out one's arms to the darkness, and whispers, "Come to me," to ears that cannot hear. What strange unnatural creatures we are, for we stifle the voices of our souls, and seem to delight in torturing ourselves for the sake of some idea born of a tradition, the value of which we dare not even submit to the test of argument. If in response to your heart's cry there came the one whose presence you desire, you would instantly torture yourself rather than confess your message. Whatever it cost you, you would not only pretend that the sudden appearance of the greatly beloved

was the last thing you wished for, but you might even send him away with the impression that he had deeply offended you. And yet—Ah well! this artificial fortress we take such pains to build, and to keep in repair, is not proof against every assault. There are crises of life—an imminent danger, the presence or appearance of death, a sudden and irresistible wave of passionate feeling, or a separation that has no promise of reunion—before these the carefully constructed rampart of convention and outward seeming goes down like a house of cards.

> "When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
> When, jaded by the rush and glare
> Of the interminable hours,
> Our eyes within another's eyes see clear;
> When one world-deafened ear
> Is by the tones of a loved voice caressed,
> A bolt is shot back somewhere in the heart,
> And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again;
> The eye sinks inward and the heart lies plain,
> And what we mean we say,
> And what we would we know."

There was a day which, to me, will ever be my day of days—halcyon hours of joy and gladness, coloured by a setting of wondrous beauty, and burdened by the fateful shadow of an inevitable parting that would, in all human probability, be the point where two lives, which had grown strangely

and sweetly close, must divide, without any hope of re-uniting. You remember how in that early dawn we drove through the dewy grass, covered with the fairies' dainty white gossamer kerchiefs, lace cobwebs spread out to dry in the morning sun; and, as we left the town and made for the distant mountains, the dark red road wound up and down hills, through orchards and grass-land and forest, till we gained a little village, where the road forked, and a clear, rain-swollen stream slipped swiftly past the picturesque brown cottages. Whilst the horses were being changed, we strolled a little way down the road, and watched a group of laughing urchins, playing in that lilied stream like water-babies. How they screamed with delight as their small glistening bodies emerged from the shining water to struggle up a crazy ladder that led from the back of a hut down into the winding stream; and how the sun shone! lighting the snow-white plumage of a brood of solemn-looking ducks, sailing majestically round the sedge-girt edges of a tiny pool beneath the bridge. In that pool was mirrored a patch of clear blue sky, and across it fell the shadows cast by a great forest tree. That was "a day in spring, a day with thee and pleasure!" Then, as we drove on, there were heavenly glimpses

of sapphire hills, seen down long vistas through the forest. For the last few miles, the road followed the bank of a deep and rapid river, whose clear waters reflected the graceful overhanging trees, while the banks were buried in a thick maze of ferns and grasses, and great shining patches of buttercups and marigolds.

Were you sorry when the drive was over, and our sweet converse perforce ended? I wonder would you have enjoyed it better had that exquisite spot, in the depths of the forest, been ours alone for that one day? One day is so little in a life-time, and yet what was ours was good! Do you remember how, in that far-off place, we met on the road one whom you recognised, but whose face and manner gave no clue to the romantic story of his life, a story that would have brought him great renown in the days when valour was accounted of the highest worth? You have not forgotten that, nor yet the return drive, when, as we crested the last hill, and began the steep and tortuous descent into the plain, the lurid rays of the setting sun threw crimson stains across dark pools of lotus-bearing water, half-hidden by overhanging grasses and the dank leaves of white-blossomed lilies. Beneath us lay a wide stretch of swamp-land, the

very picture of abandonment, desolation, and solitude; heaps of up-turned earth, green with rank vegetation, and pools of dead water, whose dark shadows reflected the lambent fires of the western horizon. A broken line of black trees stood clear against the rapidly-darkening sky, but, as we reached the foot of the hill, heaven and earth were wrapped in the shadows of night. And then my day was done. Doubt was buried, and the "big word" bound our hearts in the joy of that priceless sympathy which carries human aspirations beyond the storm and stress of human life to a knowledge of the Divine. We said little; when hearts are at one, few words are needed, for either knows the other's thoughts. But you were slow to unbend, making a brave fight against fate, and keeping true to your creed, though seven days would bring the end. To me, the light of that one brilliant day had been intensified by the rapidly approaching shadow of the inevitable parting. I wonder—now that the bitterness of separation has come, now that I vaguely ask myself what has happened to Time since I lost you—whether, if we could have that day again, you would again be so merciless in your determination to hold love in leash, and give no sign of either the passion or the pain that was

tearing your heart. I think it was a hard fight, for, though you concealed your thoughts, you could not hide the physical effects of the struggle. Did you know how your weariness distressed me, and what I would have given to have the right to try to comfort you ?

I have a confused memory of those other days. Brief meetings and partings; insane desires to make any excuse to write to you, or hear from you, though I had but just left your presence; a hopeless and helpless feeling that I had a thousand things to say to you, and yet that I never could say one of them, because the time was so short that every idea was swallowed up in the ever-present dread of your departure, and the ceaseless repetition of your cry, "I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it." From out that vague background shine two stars, two brilliant memories to light the darkness of the weary months until I see your face again — a blissful memory and a sign. All the rest seems swallowed up in the bitterness of that parting, which comes back like some horrible nightmare.

Only black water under a heavy overcast sky; only the knowledge that the end had come; that what should be said must be said then, with the

instant realisation that the pain of the moment, the feeling of impotent rebellion against fate, detsroyed all power of reflection, and the impulse to recklessness was only choked back by the cold words of a publicly spoken farewell. Then rapid motion, and in one minute the envious darkness had taken everything but the horrible sense of loss and inconsolable regret. Whatever my suffering, it was worse for you; I at least was alone, alone with a voice which ever murmured in my ears that despairing cry, "I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it."

When two who have been brought together, so close together that they have said the "big word" without faltering, are suddenly swept asunder by the receding wave of adverse circumstances, there must ever arise in their hearts that evil question, "How is it now? Is it the same? Or have time, and distance, and a thousand other enemies, so filled the space between us that the memory of either is growing dim, and the influence of the other waning, waning till the absence of all binding tie begins to feel like a very bond. Will the vision simply fade gradually out of sight?" For us there is no promise, no tie, no protestations of fealty; only knowledge, and that forced upon us rather

than sought. You give or you don't give, that is all; if you also take away, you are within your right. There may be reasons and reasons, I understand them all; and I have only one desire, that whatever prevails may secure you happiness. What you can give seems to me so unlike what others ever have to give, so infinitely beyond price, that, where I might gain, it is not right that I should speak. Therefore I cannot urge, I dare not even plead, a cause that has less to recommend it than the forlornest hope.

XXXV

OF OBSESSION

IF that is irrevocable—why, then, no more. You can only decide, and while I would not have you consider me, I do ask you to think of yourself. I have no title to be considered, not the remotest; if I had, it might be different. Possibly, even, I had better not write now, and yet I must, though you say "Don't." It cannot matter for this once, and after—well, there may be no after. We are curiously inconsistent and very hard to understand; even when we think we know each other well, we speak to conceal our thoughts; and, when we write (and it is often easier to write what we mean than to say it) I wonder whether it occurs to us how marvellously contradictory we can be, and what difficult riddles we can frame, in two or three pages of a letter that comes straight from the heart and cries to be understood. Verily we are the slaves of circumstance; but whilst we accept

that position, whilst we make sacrifices that can be absolutely heroic, and dumbly suffer the crucifixion of a lifetime, we want one other heart to know and understand. There are few things harder to bear than to stifle every strongest inclination, every dearest hope, to shut the gate of life, to lock it and throw away the key, with a determination to accept existence and make the best of it. God knows how bitter is that renunciation, but, if it be for another, and that other misunderstands, then the cruelty of it all seems almost beyond endurance.

If I may write no more to you, you may never understand. If I saw you, later, under other circumstances, I could not speak; so there can be no explanation for me. I do not plead, I may not. Not once, but often you have heard my profession of faith—a gift is good, because it is given freely. The greatest good, the most priceless gift, is love. It is valuable because it is free. You cannot buy it or compel it; even when given, you cannot lock it up, or chain it down, and say, "It is mine for ever." It comes, and it is the joy of life; it goes, and it is pity, misery, despair. It is as useless to rave against the loss, as to shake one's fist at Zeus and his thunderbolts. If I ever had, then

I was thrice-blessed. If I have no longer, the fault is probably mine, and I have still the knowledge of what was. Not God Himself can deprive me of that. I would have liked that you should know all I yearn to say, but because you are not here to tell me, "Say it, say it all," therefore I must keep silence. Perhaps I do not read aright all you mean; but some at least I know, and that is what you would have me understand without any shadow of doubt. That I realise, down to the very lowest depths of the suffering which is dumb for sheer pain; and I can say nothing, absolutely nothing, because I have no right; nay, more, you tell me to be silent. Surely you know, you know, what I would say? You remember how one evening we rode out by the rocks, and we talked of a story of faith and high resolve, and you said you did not think I was capable of a like devotion. That was a fairy tale; but what I said then, I repeat, with greater confidence, now; with hope, yes, I could stand and wait—with none, perhaps not.

That is all of me. What your letters have been you know, or at least you can guess, for I have answered them, and in those answers you could read all I might not say. "There must be an end,

and it is not because of the trouble, but it is because of the pleasure." You could not tell me that and think, because you bid me, I would not answer? Nor does one forget—fortunately—though if to forget be fortunate, I suppose to remember must be unfortunate, only it does not seem so to me. "Silence is a great barrier"—yes, death is silence, and the greatest barrier of all, and the silence of the living is, in a way, harder to bear, for it seems so needlessly unkind. Silence, determined, unbroken silence, will, I think, kill all feeling. I will not accept that as your last word, not yet; but if, when you receive this, you make that the beginning of silence, then I shall know, and I will not break it. Only I beg of you not to do so hard a thing as this, for I will gladly accept any less cruel sentence if you will not make yourself as dead to me. I have not done anything that need drive you to issue such an edict. Will not some less hopeless judgment, something short of eternal silence, serve until I bring on myself this ghastly doom? You are thinking that it was I who said, "All or nothing," I who said friendship was too hard a road to tread. That was before—before I had tried; before I knew all I know now. You hid your heart far out of sight, and I never dared to guess—I do not now.

But you went, and I, remembering how you went catch at straws; for, as the Eastern says, I am drowning in the deepest sea. Do not think that is extravagant; it is because I have learned to count the unattainable at its true value that I also realise the immensity of the loss. We stood on either side of a wall, and because the wall was near to me I looked over it and almost forgot its existence. You, standing farther off, saw always the wall, and it shut me out. Then I, thinking it could be nothing to you, tried to get across the intervening space, and so fell, hurting myself, as those who fall must do. It was not a caprice, not an impulse that took me, it was the victory of the uncontrollable. So, doubting me, and to do right for both, you said, "I will build a wall too, stronger and higher, and then we can sometimes look over and talk to each other, and everything will be well." But it is not well. Only you have vowed yourself to the work, and, if it seems hard, you say that all things are hard, and this must be good because it costs so much. To suffer is bad enough; to give suffering where you would strain every nerve to give only joy is so hard that, to help the other, seems worth any conceivable pain to oneself. What can it matter how it affects me, if I can do some

little good for you; something that may save you a little pain, win you a little joy? Believe me, I have no wish but this. Whatever my selfishness would suggest is not really me, for "Thy law is my delight"; nay more, it is my delight to try to anticipate your wish. I have no fear except that you should misunderstand me, that I should misunderstand you. I am my own to offer, yours to accept—equally if, by effacement, I can save you the smallest regret, help you for a few yards over the stony path of life by keeping silence, you will neither see nor hear from me again. I would you did not doubt, perhaps you do not now; at least you cannot distrust, and in this I shall not fail. I shall not say farewell. I will never say that; but through the silence, if so it must be, sometimes, on a day in spring, perhaps, will come the echo of a past that you can recall with nothing more than regret. And that is what I do not quite understand. You say, "In all the years to come I shall not regret." Not regret what has been, what might have been, or what will be then? Therein lies all the difference, and therein lies the riddle, there and in those words, "I am sometimes—" How am I to supply the rest? It might be any one of so many things.

Could it ever be that you are sometimes driven to wonder whether everything I could offer is worth anything you would give? "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned." If that be true, and it has high authority, then in that one sentence is contained the conclusion of the whole matter. It tells you all that you can wish to know for yourself and myself and even for others. I have done; an accident drew from me an acknowledgment of my own hurt when it seemed unlikely that the fact should interest you. Now I am so unfortunate that, hurt myself, I have made you suffer as well. I have nothing to offer to help you, for all I had is yours already. And so the end: if so you deem it best. "*Si j'étais Dieu*," I would use what power I had to spare you a moment's pain and give you such happiness that you should forget the meaning of the word "suffering." How utterly powerless we are, how impotent to save those we love, when no offer of the best we have, no devotion, no self-effacement, will secure the happiness of one other being, whose every pulse throbs in unison with ours, yet between whom and us there is fixed the great gulf of our own conventions. Is the end of all

human hopes, all human sorrows, described in these two lines?—

> "Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee
> There was, and then no more of Thee and Me."

"Let me say it whilst I have the courage." Suppose you had the greater courage to write, "I will never say it." Let me rather cry with Saul, "Farewell to others, but never we part." And yet I know that we have already parted to meet no more.

XXXVI

OF PARADISE LOST

BY a dispensation of that Providence which, if seldom kind, is sometimes less than malignant, I received your two letters together—the poison and the antidote. I looked at the dates on the postmarks, and I took the poison first. It did not take long to read, and I am glad now that I can truly tell you that my impulse was to ignore your expressed wish, your command, and to at once tell you that I did not believe a single word of those lines, which, if meant to hurt, could not have been better conceived, for truly they were coldly cruel. Indeed, the note was hateful, and so absolutely unlike you, that it must have defeated its object, had that been really as you declared it. If you know me at all, you must have realised that, if I know the Kingdom of Heaven may not be taken by storm, I should never seek for the charity which is thrown to the importunate. But the other letter

was there, and in it I found such measure of consolation as is vouchsafed to those who find that, if their path is difficult, they will not tread it alone, and it tends upward. It may not be all we desire —how should it be in a world which is full of

> "Infinite passion
> And the pain of finite hearts that yearn"?

Still, it is much; and, at the worst, it is death without its sting.

Do I know? I think I do. You see, if the future contains nothing for me, I have still the past—and, in that past, I have learnt to implicitly trust you, and you have let me see enough of your very self to make me disregard even what comes from you, when it has nothing in common with your real character. But I shall not forget—I do not do that easily at any time—and, if all else faded, I could not forget our friendship. Do you think the first man and woman ever forgot that once they dwelt in Paradise? It was the recollection of all they had lost which was the beginning of mortal suffering. If that "pleasant place" is closed to me, I am not likely to forget that I have seen the gate, that I know where to find it, and that there is but one. Yes, I understand; and the proof is, that in my regret there is no bitterness

now. I also remember what I said when we leant over the balustrade of a verandah and looked out into the silver sheen of a ravishing Eastern night, wherein the frail chalices of the moonflower shone like great, milk-white stars in their leafy sky, while from the trellis-work beneath us rose the faint, sweet scent of those strange blossoms. You have taught me how great the exception can be. The cynicism is only skin-deep, and I shall never swell the ranks of the Faithful—though I still think there is much to be said for the Faith. The creed, like other creeds, suffers by the perfunctory service of those who profess to be true believers. As for the way you have chosen, I think it is the right way, at least it is the best to follow now; and, to help you tread it well, I also say, "God be with you." They need not be my last words to you, for, if ever my loyal service can further any wish of yours, our friendship is not so poor a thing that you would hesitate to give me the satisfaction of doing for you anything that lies in my power. That was in the bond we made long ago. If we cannot forget what came into our dream of mutual trust and intellectual companionship, is it not better to bravely accept the fiat of Destiny and make the past a link to bind us more closely to the terms of our bond? Even so

we may still help each other, still cleave to the sympathy which we know will never fail us; and, if our paths divide, the earth is not wide enough to keep us asunder, should we ever try to say "Adieu."

XXXVII

"TO MARY, IN HEAVEN"

THIS is my last letter to you, *Carina*, and I am writing in the belief that you are in heaven. But are you really there, and, if you are, is all well with you? Have you everything you desire and no regrets? It seems such a very long way off, you have such small control over the means of transport, and so much depends on hearsay, that one may, I trust, be pardoned for entertaining doubt where all is so indefinite. Then the accounts of that blessed place that have come to different parts of the world, though always inspired differ so materially. To mortals, immortality is a difficult conception. To finite minds, conscious of the grasp of a limited intelligence, but still very much alive to the evidence of the senses we possess, the idea of a heaven, somewhere beyond the reach of earthly imagination, is perhaps more difficult still. So many millions come into the world, and we

realise fairly well how and why they come; they all, without exception, go, and none ever return, and some, we are told, are in heaven, and some elsewhere. The time here is so absurdly short, and the eternity there is so impossibly long, that, if our chances of spending the latter in joy, or sorrow, depend on what we do in the former, it is only natural that this one idea should occupy our thoughts to the exclusion of all others. Yet there, again, we are such frail things, that in this way lies what we call madness.

If you have solved the great problem, can you not enlighten my darkness, my craving for exact knowledge? Write to me, *Carina*, write and tell me what it is all like. If I have wearied you with my feeble, little tales, my stupid questions, my pictures that must seem to you so flat and colourless in the glory of that better world, my vain imaginings and poor human longings, will you not take pity on me and gladden my weary eyes with a word-painted vision of the Heavenly City, the fields of Elysium, or at least the houris who are to be the portion of the Faithful? I do not know which paradise you are in. See, I wait with the pencil on the paper: will you not make it write?

You do not heed. Perhaps, after all, you are

not there; or is it possible that you have forgotten this small planet and those you left here, and that you find more congenial friends in the company of the angels? I dare say it is natural, and I do not upbraid you; but some day I may reach that desired haven, and I want you to remember that I have earned your consideration by my discretion, if you can spare me no more tender feeling. If, for instance, I had sent you these letters while you were still on earth, and you had incautiously left them about (as you would have been certain to do), quite a number of them would have compromised you in the opinion of the servant girl, and she is the origin of a vast deal of earthly gossip. I suppose you have no servant girls and no gossip where you are: the absence of effect depending on the want of cause. Happy heaven! and yet I believe that there are people on this earth who really enjoy being the subject of gossip. To them the suggestions of scandal are as the savour of salt, as danger is to the sportsman; the wilder the suggestion, the more amusing the game; and there are even those who, when tattle wanes and desire fails, say or insinuate, to their own detriment, the thing that is not, rather than disappear into obscurity. It is the same desire for notoriety and attention which

prompted Martin to set fire to York Minster, and led the woman to complain to the vicar that her husband had ceased to beat her.

Up in the serene atmosphere of those heavenly heights you have no cathedrals, no husbands, no wives, no work, no play, no food, no frocks—pardon me, that is a slip of the pen; of course you have frocks, but what else have you? Is it not sometimes just a little monotonous? If life is so short that it amounts to little more than the constant fear of coming death, are you not sometimes overawed by the contemplation of eternity? But, after all, the dwellers in heaven may never think. Never to remember, and so never to regret; never to think, and so never to desire—that is a possible scheme of existence where a thousand years might be as one day, and to the weary it would mean rest. But so would oblivion, and we are not altogether satisfied with the thought of oblivion.

"Oh, Threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!
One thing is certain—*This* Life flies;
One thing is certain, and the rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies."

That is well enough, but it is not an inspired writing; it is a cry rather of despair than conviction, and oft repeated to make up for want of certainty.

Of things mundane we have acquired a tolerable knowledge, however much there is yet to be learnt; but that in us which we call the Soul will never be satisfied till it learns something of the hereafter. Who will teach it? Do we know more now than they did when men fought with bows and arrows, or flint weapons, instead of hundred-ton guns fired by electricity?

Standing alone in some vast solitude where man and his doings have no part, have made no mark and left no trace—where face to face with Nature, with mountain and plain, forest and sea and a limitless firmament, man's somewhat puny efforts are forgotten, there comes an intense longing for something higher and nobler than the life we live. The soul of man cries out for light, for some goal towards which he may by effort and sacrifice attain; for he is not lacking in the qualities that have made heroes and martyrs throughout all the ages. If he cannot rend the veil and scale the heights of heaven, he can grasp the things within his reach; and, realising that there are problems beyond his intelligence, he can yet give his life to make easier the lot of his fellow-creatures, seeking humbly, but courageously, to follow, no matter how far behind, in the footsteps of his Great Exemplar. Nor need his efforts be

less strenuous, his object less worthy, because this passionate cry of a voice, stilled centuries ago, strikes a sympathetic chord in his heart.

"Yet ah! that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
The Nightingale, that in the branches sang,
Ah whence, and whither flown again, who knows

Would but the Desert of the Fountain yield
One glimpse—if dimly, yet indeed reveal'd,
To which the fainting Traveller might spring,
As springs the trampled herbage of the field!

Would but some wingèd Angel, ere too late,
Arrest the yet-unfolded Roll of Fate,
And make the stern Recorder otherwise
Enregister, or quite obliterate!

Ah Love, could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!"

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